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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE POETRY
OF ROBERT GRAVES

By

Howard Zankner

B. A. University of Montana, 1965

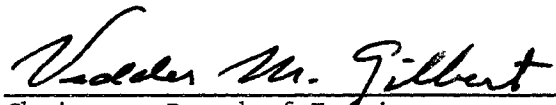
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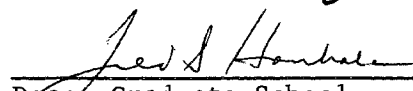
Master of Arts

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MOON-WOMAN

She came and asked:
Are the apples ripe?
The hay put up?
The wheat stored?

Didn't you know, I stammered,
The sun couldn't wait
The fields weren't ploughed
The rain was dry.

But you promised
Corn, plums,
Pears and honey
On my bread.

Didn't you see
The dog, rat and cat
Digging in the garden dust?
The clover didn't bloom.

Find me a basket, she said
Bring a hoe
The corn is ripe
This pear tastes good.

INTRODUCTION: THE THEME

The central theme of Robert Graves' poetry is derived from observations of seasonal life in the fields. He often deplores modern living and praises the nineteenth century rural life which was governed by the seasonal cycle. In the essay "Real Women," for example, he contrasts the modern housewife and her labor-saving appliances with her great-grandmother, who enjoyed such communal activities as washing down by the creek and helping with the harvest.¹ And in the lecture "Nine Hundred Iron Chariots" he disapproves of modern labor-saving devices, which weaken "man's power to cope with moral or physical problems."²

However, Graves does not advocate a return to the ways of the last century. In his futuristic novel Watch the North Wind Rise (1949), the rulers of the "Sophocratic" epoch set aside "anthropological enclaves" in which to preserve humanity. These enclaves are similar to the physical and social conditions of pre-historic Europe. The people of New Crete--one of the enclaves--worship the Goddess Mari, practice magic and ritual murder, and believe in the principal "nothing without love." While New Cretan religion, which is very similar to the Neolithic and Bronze Age religion of ancient Europe, flourishes, the Sophocrats relapse into say-agery. Not the nineteenth century, but pre-historic religion is Graves' main obsession. His praise of the last century is limited to the last "enclaves" of rural England and Europe, where people still were ruled by

¹"Real Women," in Mammon and the Black Goddess (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1965), p. 106.

²Mammon, p. 46.

the seasonal cycle and festivals such as May Eve, Lammas, and Candlemas. These festivals are survivals of the pre-historic religion of Europe, which is based on careful observations of seasonal life in the fields. And implicit in the seasonal life of the countryside is the single theme of poetry: "all the totem-societies in ancient Europe were under the domination of the Great Goddess, the Lady of Wild Things; dances were seasonal and fitted into an annual pattern from which gradually emerges the single grand theme of poetry: the life, death and resurrection of the Spirit of the Year, the Goddess' son and lover."³ Moreover, in the introduction to Graves' book of critical essays on poetry, The Common Asphodel, he writes:

"I now regard ... [the poet] as independent of fashion and public service, a servant only of the true Muse [the Great Goddess], committed on her behalf to continuous personal variations on a single pre-historic, or post-historic, poetic theme; and have thus ceased to feel the frantic strain of swimming against the stream of time."⁴

Since Graves' poetry is a personal variation on the single poetic Theme, it is important to understand the Theme for the study of his poetry.

As the son of the Goddess, the Spirit of the Year is the waxing part of the year; as her lover, he is the waning part. In the Northern Temperate Zone the waxing part of the year extends from the winter to the summer solstice, from December to June. The waning part is the remaining months of the year. In other words, the Spirit of the Year is identified

³The White Goddess, amended and enlarged edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1948), p. 471. All subsequent quotations will be from this edition.

⁴London, 1949, p. x.

with the sun's annual death and rebirth at the winter solstice. (The Spirit of the Year is also identified with seasonal rains or harvests. In a hot climate, for example, the waxing part of the year corresponds to the autumn or winter rains, which bring a rebirth of life to the land.) As a son of the Goddess he is reborn at the winter solstice, when the sun's warmth increases. As the lover of the Goddess he lives between the summer and winter solstice, the period of the sun's decline. As her son or God of the Waxing Year, the Spirit of the Year dies at the summer solstice and is resurrected at the winter solstice.

In many European myths the Spirit of the Year is represented as the Bright Twin and the Dark Twin, the Spirit of Growth and the Demon of Drought:

The Ugarit Epic, discovered at Ras Shamra in 1926, supplies one ancient text of the Theme. Two demi-gods, Aleyan and Mot, fall in love with Anatha--alias Neith, a pre-dynastic Libyan goddess. Aleyan is the Bright Twin; Mot is the Dark Twin. Although the Ras Shamra tablets are fragmentary at a crucial point, we gather from analogous myths that Anatha encouraged Mot to murder his Bright Twin Aleyan, and then went off with him. As a result, all grass and herbs languished and a universal lamentation arose. Anatha then thought again, and avenged Aleyan's death by the destruction of Mot, whose body she ground in a mill, leaving the remains to carrion birds. Finally she harrowed Hell, rescued Aleyan, and set him on his throne again. The Goddess's betrayal of the Bright Twin is a constant element in Hebrew, Greek and Celtic myth. An early non-Biblical Hebrew tradition even makes Cain murder Abel for the favours of another Eve--alias Hepta, or Hipatu, a Hittite goddess identified with Anatha.⁵

In the same lecture Graves links Aleyan and Mot with Growth and Drought:

"The Theme originally concerned a seasonal war between the Spirit of Growth and the Demon of Drought. It seems that at the barley harvest, when the blazing Palestinian sun dried up all

⁵Robert Graves, "The Personal Muse," in Oxford Addresses on Poetry (London, 1962), p. 62.

grass and herbs, Anatha, incarnate in a priestess-queen, annually ordered the crucifixion of her sacred consort as a means of placating the Demon of Drought; then took the executioner into her bed until the autumn rains should come--after which she destroyed him, chose another sacred king: in theory, the crucified man risen from the dead.⁶

In Neolithic and Bronze Age European religious practice, the Spirit of Growth was represented by an actual person: the queen's sacred consort or king. He was sacrificially murdered and resurrected. In other words, another person took the dead king's place. Similarly, the demi-god Aleyan was incarnate in a sacred king who shared the god's name and suffered his fate. And Mot had his human representative, who also suffered the god's fate.

In the same lecture Graves links the true Theme of poetry with the individual poet:

I read the story of Anatha, Aleyan and Mot not only as an ancient seasonal myth, but as a prophecy of this new, peculiar, not yet fully explored, poet-Muse relationship. Anatha may well discipline Aleyan for showing signs of marital possessiveness: may betray him with his cruel, destructive twin as a means of asserting her personal freedom. But if Aleyan survives the ordeal, after dying cheerfully for her sake, she will surely--he tells himself--raise him up again and destroy his rival. We are no longer, of course, annually subjected to semi-famine by the droughts of summer or the frosts of winter. In a city we scarcely notice the passing of the seasons, and can fly from polar cold to equatorial heat in a matter of hours, so that the seasonal myth on which the Theme rests has lost its cursed absoluteness. But the poet as Sacred King cannot avoid a love-ordeal which puts his sense of certitude to the supreme test.⁷

The individual poet, then, identifies himself with the Spirit of the Year, the sacred king. To be more precise, the poet identifies himself with

⁶Ibid., p. 62.

⁷Ibid., p. 81.

Aleyan, the God of the Waxing Year, the Goddess' son. However, he also becomes her lover before his death in the sense that he is her son when the sun is young and her lover when the sun has reached its maturity. Thus the poet is the son-lover or simply the lover of the Goddess. The poet suffers the same fate as Aleyan, the Spirit of Growth. Of course, the poet does not actually die, but he does suffer a symbolic or spiritual death and resurrection at the hands of the Great Goddess or White Goddess, and like Aleyan, the poet trusts the Goddess to destroy his rival. The poet's rival is his other self, or tanist, or weird, who "often appears in nightmare as the tall, lean, dark-faced bed-side spectre, or Prince of the Air, who tries to drag the dreamer out through the window, so that he looks back and sees his body still lying rigid in bed; but he takes countless other malevolent or diabolic or serpent-like forms."⁸ Because Graves identifies himself with the God of the Waxing Year, his poems are "personal variations" on the single Theme of poetry--the life, death and resurrection of the Goddess' lover. The majority of Graves' poems are spiritual autobiography, dramatizations of his experiences of the Muse or White Goddess.

The Muse is not easy to define. In The White Goddess Graves declares:

But it must never be forgotten that the Triple Goddess as worshipped for example at Stymphalus, was a personification of primitive woman--woman the creatress and destructress. As the New Moon or Spring she was girl; as the Full Moon or Summer she was woman; as the Old Moon or Winter she was hag" (p. 428).

⁸The White Goddess, pp. 11-12.

The Muse is also a Goddess. The poem "In Her Praise" contrasts mortal woman with the Goddess who abides:

This they know well: the Goddess yet abides.
 Though each new lovely woman whom she rides,
 Straddling her neck a year or two or three,
 Should sink beneath such weight of majesty
 And, groping back to humankind, gainsay
 The headlong power that whitened all her way
 With a broad track of trefoil--leaving you,
 Her chosen lover, ever again thrust through
 With daggers, your purse rifled, your rings gone--
 Nevertheless they call you to live on
 To parley with the pure, oracular dead,
 To hear the wild pack whimpering overhead,
 To watch the moon tugging at her cold tides.
 Woman is mortal woman. She abides.⁹

Many lovers of the Goddess have recorded their vision of her.

Lucius Apuleius' account of the Goddess is one of the finest. The Goddess herself speaks to him:

All the perfumes of Arabia floated into my nostrils as the Goddess deigned to address me: "You see me here, Lucius, in answer to your prayer. I am Nature, the universal Mother, mistress of all the elements, primordial child of time, sovereign of all things spiritual, queen of the dead, queen also of the immortals, the single manifestation of all gods and goddesses that are. My nod governs the shining heights of Heaven, the wholesome sea-breezes, the lamentable silences of the world below. Though I am worshipped in many aspects, known by countless names, and propitiated with all manner of different rites, yet the whole round earth venerates me. . . .From the Elysian fields you will see me as queen of the profound Stygian realm, shining through the darkness of Acheron with a light as kindly and tender as I show you now. Further, if you are found to deserve my divine protection by careful obedience to the ordinances of my religion and by perfect chastity, you will become aware that I, and I alone, have power to prolong your life beyond the limits appointed by destiny."¹⁰

⁹ Robert Graves, Collected Poems 1966, 1st ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), p. 308. All poems quoted hereafter are from the 1966 edition, unless noted otherwise.

¹⁰ The Golden Ass, trans. Robert Graves (New York: Pocket Library, 1959), p. 238, 240.

The Goddess' identification with "Nature" is apt, for the natural power of life and death is the same power that woman has over man. The Goddess is also a "creatress" and "destruress." Indeed, she is known as the Goddess of Life-in-Death and Death-in-Life. However, the Goddess is not only the sovereign of the natural world, but also of "all things spiritual." She has power over life and death. And she grants men divine wisdom. In fact, she inspires the poet to write poems in her honor; but she also points out his faults to him. However, "her habit has never been to coerce, but always to grant or withhold her favours according as her sons and lovers come to her with exactly the right gifts in their hands--gifts of their own choosing, not her dictation."¹¹ The only demand the Goddess makes is absolute faith in her being. Just as the dedicated worshipper of God trusts Him to dispel evil, keep him safe, and bless his home, regardless of his present sufferings, so, too, the dedicated poet trusts the Goddess to raise him from the dead, inspire him again, and murder his evil rival. The dedicated poet continues to love the Goddess in spite of her cruelty. However, the Goddess is not spiteful; she is impartial: "The Sun grows weaker or stronger as the year takes its course, the branches of the tree are now loaded and now bare, but the light of the Moon is invariable. She is impartial: she destroys or creates with equal passion."¹²

Perhaps the hardest thing for the modern reader to understand is Graves' absolute devotion to the Goddess. Though the Goddess betrays her poet and chooses his rival, the poet willingly suffers the "love-ordeal," which tests his confidence and faith in the Goddess, his mother, bride,

¹¹The White Goddess, p. 540.

¹²Ibid., p. 430.

and layer-out. The poet understands that she knows only what she must do, not why:

To be possessed by her is to possess--
Though rooted in this thought
Build nothing on it.

Unreasonable faith becomes you
And mute endurance
Even of betrayal.

Never expect to be brought wholly
Into her confidence.
Being natural woman

She knows what she must do, not why:
Balks your anticipation
of pleasure vowed;

Yet, no less vulnerable than you,
Suffers the dire pangs
Of your self-defeat. (p. 304)

The above poem, "Possessed," illustrates the poet's attitude toward the Goddess. Knowing that the Muse can exercise no power without her poet, he nevertheless does not reveal her dependence on him. He endures her betrayal again and again. Above all, the poet needs the Goddess' love, for without it he cannot properly be a poet--die for her sake, honor her divinity in his poems, and be inspired by her divine wisdom. This "unreasonable faith" in the Goddess may strike the modern reader as archaic. And few modern poets would agree with Graves' statement that a vision of the crucified King is necessary for an understanding of poetry:

Poetry began in the matriarchal age, and derives its magic from the moon, not from the sun. No poet can hope to understand the nature of poetry unless he has had a vision of the Naked King crucified to the lopped oak, and watched the dancers, red-eyed from acrid smoke of the sacrificial fires, stamping out the measure of the dance,

their bodies bent uncouthly forward, with a monotonous chant of:
'Kill kill! kill!' and 'Blood! blood! blood!'¹³

My study of Graves' poetry is introductory and selective rather than comprehensive. The discussions of his poems are not complete, but designed to introduce the reader to the fundamental themes and ideas in the poems. For example, in my first chapter, "The Years after the First World War," I do not examine all the poems written after the war, and I ignore Graves' historical and satiric poems; instead, I concentrate on those poems that reflect the poet's despair, fear, and spiritual death of the post-War years, resulting from his stay in the trenches of France. One fact needs emphasis: few of the poems written between 1914 and 1918 survive in Graves' later collected editions. His reason for the suppression of these early poems is that "moral definitions may be invented for historical emergencies, but when a historical emergency passes, the moral definition passes with it: moral, or local, truth is finally unreal."¹⁴ The "historical emergency" is the First World War. Graves has suppressed almost all the poems that deal with the trenches for the above reason.

Graves' poems of the 1920's and the 1930's often do not reflect the single Theme of poetry. And the development from the poems of the 1920's to the poems of the 1940's that do reflect a single Theme is not easy to follow. However, Graves' experiences in the trenches and his post-War neurasthenic condition made him familiar with death and spiritual death. In other words, the experience of spiritual death after the War eventually seems to fit into the later pattern of spiritual or symbolic

¹³Ibid., p. 502.

¹⁴The Common Asphodel, p. 283.

death and resurrection--the "love-ordeal"--that the lover of the Goddess willingly suffers on her behalf. But not until the 1940's did Graves explicitly write of the one poetic Theme. Therefore, in this first chapter I have included a section that shows a transitional period--the late 1920's and the 1930's--in Graves' poetry. In the poem "To Juan at the Winter Solstice" Graves maintains that a poet can write about the one Theme intuitively or learnedly. Apparently, then, in the 1920's and 1930's Graves was moving toward the single Theme intuitively, but he did not write about the Theme explicitly and learnedly until the 1940's.

My second chapter, "The Cruel Goddess, Myth, and Poetry," is also introductory. Beginning roughly in the 1930's Graves' poems show an increasing use of traditional poetic expressions, culminating in the 1940's in the full use of the ancient language of poetic myth, of which the Ugarit Epic, mentioned in the above excerpt from "The Personal Muse," is one example. From the middle of the 1940's Graves continues to use the language of myth; he never abandons it. My main purpose in the second chapter is to introduce the reader to the language of poetic myth. Since the poetic language is complex to the unfamiliar, I concentrate on identifying and clarifying the language as it occurs in the poems. (I accomplish this by a careful selection of those poems that are best suited for an introduction to the poetic language.) A fundamental understanding of the language should help the (now) informed reader to share the poet's experiences of the Goddess. And since the language of myth occurs in a specific context--the poem--I usually give a general interpretation of the poem on the basis of the identification of words or phrases that have specific mythological meanings. In other words, the language of poetic myth conveys the themes and ideas of the poems.

The identifications, clarifications, and interpretations are presented without cumbersome explanations and excursions. For example, I do not explain the origin of the association of the Moon with woman in the language of myth. My task in this study is to make the reader aware of the many associations in the poems, not to present origins and reasons. For the reader to know that in Graves' poetry Moon and woman are inextricably linked together is my purpose, not to answer why.

The authorities for my interpretations are always and foremost the poems themselves, Graves' poems as a whole, and my intuition. Graves maintains that he writes only for the Muse and other Muse-poets who are familiar with Muse-poetry--poetic myths. However, for those who are unacquainted with Muse-poetry I quote many passages from Graves' prose; they are not necessary for an understanding of his poetry, but they are helpful to the unacquainted, for they clarify in prose the language of poetic myth used in the poems. To use one of Graves' poems to clarify another is not helpful. Therefore, I have included generous portions of his prose in this study. The appropriateness of a prose passage to a poem rests on my own sense of aptness. And, too, the book The White Goddess was written by Graves for other Muse-poets; the book is a "historical grammar of poetic myth" and contains Graves' examinations of ancient poetic myths. Though I derive much information from that book, the individual poem always dictates its own meaning. I also quote excerpts from lectures and essays which seem to me helpful in defining Graves' basic themes, ideas, and attitudes. Though Graves is still living, the poem "To Bring the Dead to Life" perhaps best conveys my attitude and approach to his poetry:

To bring the dead to life
 Is no great magic.
 Few are wholly dead:
 Blow on a dead man's embers
 And a live flame will start.

Let his forgotten griefs be now,
 And now his withered hopes;
 Subdue your pen to his handwriting
 Until it prove as natural
 To sign his name as yours.

Limp as he limped,
 Swear by the oaths he swore;
 If he wore black, affect the same;
 If he had gouty fingers,
 Be yours gouty too.

Assemble tokens intimate of him--
 a seal, a cloak, a pen;
 Around these elements then build
 A home familiar to
 The greedy revenant.

So grant him life, but reckon
 That the grave which housed him
 May not be empty now:
 You in his spotted garments
 Shall yourself lie wrapped. (p. 110)

The last chapter, "The Benign Goddess and the Black Goddess," continues the method of identification and clarification followed in the second chapter. The thematic emphasis in the first part of this chapter is on those poems that reflect the beneficent Goddess. In the previous chapter the poet's symbolic death-- her cruel aspect--predominates in the poems; in the last chapter I discuss poems that reflect her love, her power of life and inspiration, and the poet's continuing love of the Goddess.

The poems dealing with the Black Goddess introduce the theme of transcendence. In these poems the poet no longer suffers the "love-ordeal." The Black Goddess is associated with spiritual rebirth, and she seems to

signify the poet's spiritual rebirth, his transcendence of the spiritual death of the post-War years and of the single Theme of poetry, associated with the White Goddess. Nevertheless, the language of poetic myth, introduced in the second chapter and associated with the White Goddess or Muse, is still the vehicle for the poet's experiences recorded in the poems. Robert Graves regards love between man and woman as an unforeseeable miracle; however, he regards continuous love between man and woman an impossibility, "transcended only by a belief in miracle"; and since the Black Goddess, unlike the White Goddess, is beyond the death and resurrection cycle--the single Theme of poetry, she represents a miraculous certitude in love.

The poems dealing with the Black Goddess probably were written after 1960. However, since Graves does not date his poems, it is only an approximate date as are all my divisions by years of his poems. And, too, Graves sometimes includes at a later date revised poems that appeared in earlier editions. Throughout this study I have used the revised poem rather than an earlier form of the poem. Though the precise dates of the poems concerned with the Black Goddess are not given, they appear at the end of Graves' long life and at the end of his latest collected edition, and therefore they aptly conclude the study of his poetry.

Robert Graves' poetry does not offer any "insights" into mythology, literature, or human nature. But the reader is invited to share the poet's spiritual experiences of the Goddess. Graves' poems are not analytical probes of problems in literature, culture, and society. In fact, he describes the single theme of poetry as "pre-historic" and "post-historic," that is to say, the Theme is independent of historical events

and time. Indeed, many of his poems ignore time altogether, incorporating past, present, and future events simultaneously in one poem.

There is no formula for reading a Graves' poem. Those who discover illumination in the sight of a cherry blossom and a field of wheat filled with poppies and cool blue cornflowers will find Graves' poems emotionally relevant to their own spiritual experiences. Those who are visited by paranoid visions in their dreams will understand the Theme. And those who have been blessed by the Goddess' smiling face will recognize her features in Graves' poems. The magic miracles alive in her natural world are, of course, no longer recognized by the townsman. But he is to be pitied, not envied. And what does the Goddess look like? Her unforgettable and holy figure, standing on the waves, appeared to Lucius Apuleius in answer to his prayer. His description of her is one of the most comprehensive found in ancient literature:

Her long thick hair fell in tapering ringlets on her lovely neck, and was crowned with an intricate chaplet in which was woven every kind of flower. Just above her brow shone a round disc, like a mirror, or like the bright face of the moon, which told me who she was. Vipers rising from the left-hand and right-hand partings of her hair supported this disc, with ears of corn bristling beside them. Her many-coloured robe was of finest linen; part was glistening white, part crocus-yellow, part glowing red and along the entire hem a woven bordure of flowers and fruit clung swaying in the breeze. But what caught and held my eye more than anything else was the deep black lustre of her mantle. She wore it slung across her body from the right hip to the left shoulder, where it was caught in a knot resembling the boss of a shield; but part of it hung in innumerable folds, the tasselled fringe quivering. It was embroidered with glittering stars on the hem and everywhere else, and in the middle beamed a full and fiery moon. . . . A boat-shaped gold dish hung from her left hand, and along the upper surface of the handle writhed an asp with puffed throat and head raised ready to strike. On her divine feet were slippers of palm leaves, the emblem of victory.¹⁵

¹⁵The Golden Ass, pp. 237-238.

CHAPTER I

THE YEARS AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR

During the First World War Graves wrote many poems that directly deal with the War, but he suppressed most of them in his later collected editions because they represent "local truth," which is "unreal." The full horror of the War did not affect Graves until after the armistice. The terror, pain and death he saw in the trenches seem to have fostered in him the post-War themes of despair, doom, and spiritual or symbolic death that occur in the poems of the early 1920's. After the War Graves lived as if still under war conditions. Thus, the despair, doom, and spiritual death recorded in the poems are no fictions, but reflect the conditions and feeling with which Graves continued to live for ten years after the Treaty of Versailles. Not the poems dealing directly with the War, but the poems that record the personal despair and spiritual death of the post-War years are the more poignant and important, for they foreshadow Graves' later definition of the one poetic Theme, especially the need for the poet to suffer a symbolic death.

"Recalling War," though written twenty years after the First World War, offers a general statement of what the war meant to Graves and to the soldiers who survived the trenches of France:

Entrance and exit wounds are silvered clean,
The track aches only when the rain reminds.
The one-legged man forgets his leg of wood,
The one-armed man his jointed wooden arm.
The blinded man sees with his ears and hands.
As much or more than once with both his eyes.
Their war was fought these twenty years ago
And now assumes the nature-look of time,
As when the morning traveller turns and views
His wild night-stumbling carved into a hill.

What, then, was war? No mere discord of flags
 But an infection of the common sky
 That sagged ominously upon the earth
 Even when the season was the airiest May.
 Down pressed the sky, and we, oppressed, thrust out
 Boastful tongue, clenched fist and valiant yard.
 Natural infirmities were out of mode,
 For Death was young again: patron alone
 Of healthy dying, premature fate-spasm.

Fear made fine bed-fellows. Sick with delight
 At life's discovered transitoriness,
 Our youth became all-flesh and waived the mind.
 Never was such antiqueness of romance,
 Such tasty honey oozing from the heart.
 And old importances came swimming back--
 Wine, meat, long-fires, a roof over the head,
 A weapon at the thigh, surgeons at call.
 Even there was a use again for God--
 A word of rage in lack of meat, wine, fire,
 In ache of wounds beyond all surgeoning.

War was return of earth to ugly earth,
 War was foundering of sublimities,
 Extinction of each happy art and faith
 By which the world had still kept head in air,
 Protesting logic or protesting love,
 Until the unendurable moment struck--
 The inward scream, the duty to run mad.

And we recall the merry ways of guns--
 Nibbling the walls of factory and church
 Like a child, piecrust; felling groves of trees
 Like a child, dandelions with a switch.
 Machine-guns rattle toy-like from a hill,
 Down in a row the brave tin-soldiers fall:
 A sight to be recalled in elder days
 When learnedly the future we devote
 To yet more boastful visions of despair.¹

Graves, like the "blinded man," sees more after the war than before. The war resulted from no mere disagreement among nations, but from "an infection of the common sky," from something wrong in Western culture. Though Graves did not know what was wrong with Western values in 1918, he has

¹Collected Poems (New York, 1961), p. 130.

since described historically the cause of our chaotic ethics. In the essay "Intimations of the Black Goddess" he describes the cause of our confused values as an imbalance between two principles: "The chaotic ethics of our epoch derive, I believe, from a revolution in early historical times that upset the balance between male and female principles: namely, the supersession of matriarchy by patriarchy. This revolt, and the subsequent patriarchal cult of reason (as opposed to intuitive thought), gave men control over most domestic, agricultural, and other arts. Women became chattels, no longer able even to bestow [sic] their love freely or educate their own children."² However, not only do the "chaotic ethics" of our time derive from the imbalance of male and female principles, the "patriarchal cult of reason" is also responsible for such inventions as bombs, machine guns, and wars. In his third Oxford lecture of 1961, Graves expresses the hope that modern man "can perhaps be persuaded that the a-moral exercise of intellect has created institutions hostile to human happiness--total wars, uncontrolled money, denatured food, soul-destroying machines, academicism, commercialized entertainment--which is no great advance on prehistoric savagery."³ The First World War is one manifestation of the imbalance of the two principles, of the "a-moral exercise of intellect." In The White Goddess Graves sees "no change for the better until everything gets far worse. Only after a period of complete political and religious disorganization can the suppressed desire of the Western races, which is for some practical form of Goddess-worship, with her love not limited to maternal benevolence and her after-world not deprived of a sea, find satisfaction at last" (p. 539).

²Mammon, p. 145.

³Oxford Addresses, p. 77.

Politics or nationalism, the "mere discord of flags," were not the cause of the war, nor do these terms define the war. Death, confusion, and fear, however, are terms that do define the war. "Sick with delight / At live's discovered transitoriness" suggests the distorted sensory life of the trenches. And youth was transformed into "all flesh," meaning that the ideals of youth made no sense under war conditions, the "transitoriness" of the soldier's life. Even the "mind," the power of thought, was excluded from war life. The physical world of the soldier and his life-blood or "honey" were the sole objects of love: "Never was such antiqueness of romance/ Such tasty honey oozing from the heart."

The first line of the fourth stanza suggests that the "ugly earth" received what already belonged to her: dead men. The line also suggests that the soldiers, who were "all-flesh" and in that sense the "earth," returned to the "ugly earth," meaning that the "ugly earth" was their only reality, and therefore the war was the loss of "sublimities," "happy art," and "faith."

In the last stanza the poet recalls the purposelessness of war. The guns have "merry" ways; they nibble at the "factory" and "church" like a child eating a "piecrust." The image of the child cutting down "dandelions with a switch" suggests the purposelessness of the guns, of the war. The whole stanza suggests that the war was arbitrary, senseless, and purposeless. The soldiers were only playing a game with "tin-soldiers." The poem ends on the simple notion that more wars will come, wars more terrible than the First World War. The War resulted from "an infection of the common sky," which Graves later attributes to man's loss of woman's intuitive or natural wisdom, the answer to "total wars," but

the poem itself does not suggest a solution to war; it only ends on the note of despair.

Graves' despair during the early 1920's is well illustrated by the poem "Down." The first half of the second stanza typically concentrates only on further levels of despair, never suggesting any escape from that condition:

Mouth open he was lying, this sick man,
And sinking all the while; how had he come
To sink? On better nights his dream went flying,
Dipping, sailing the pasture of his sleep,
But now (since clock and cock) had sunk him down
Through mattress, bed, floor, floors beneath, stairs, cellars,
Through deep foundations of the manse; still sinking
Through unturned earth. How had he magicked space
With inadvertent motion or word uttered
Of too-close-packed intelligence (such there are),
That he should penetrate with sliding ease
Dense earth, compound of ages, granite ribs
And groins? Consider: there was some word uttered,
Some abracadabra--then, like a stage-ghost,
Funereally with weeping, down, drowned, lost! (p. 27)

The use of the third person emphasizes the poet's alienation from himself. He watches himself sink down through the earth; that is, his situation becomes more hopeless as he penetrates the earth. Though the "man" is in a manor house, he easily slides through the floor and cellar of the building. Somehow and inadvertently he "magicked space" and thus penetrated the manor and the earth.

The "man" is also sinking through his own mind. His intelligence is hard-packed or "close-packed" as the earth is packed by weight. Such a hard intelligence admits no despair, and it can answer why the "man" sank so low. The word "too" suggests that the intelligence, by dwelling on the question of "how had he come/ To sink?", contributes to the condi-

tion of despair. Ironically some "abracadabra," some magic word of the intelligence enables the man to penetrate the earth and the hard intelligence. And after sinking through his intelligence, past his ribs, the "sick man" sinks into his groin. In other words, the power of lust is drawing the "man" deeper and deeper into his own primitive region, his "compound of ages." Metaphorically, the "man" is sinking into the "groins" of the earth, into the Universal Mother, the source of lust and fear.

The last stanza leaves the "man" still falling to yet deeper levels of despair and lust:

Falling, falling! Day closed up behind him.
Now stunned by the violent subterrene flow
Of rivers, whirling down to hiss below
On the flame-axis of this terrible earth;
Toppling upon their waterfall, O spirit. . . . (p. 28)

At night, in the dark, the "man" is "stunned by the violent subterrene flow": he is overwhelmed by the primitive emotion of lust, which causes him more despair and pain. Metaphorically, the "sick man" is underneath the "earth," in the primitive part of the earth, and there he sees that lust, the "subterrene flow," whirls on the "flame-axis of this terrible earth." The "flame-axis" is the center of his lust. The cry of "O spirit" is drowned in the rush of waters. The poem characteristically ends in despair. For the "sick man" there is no escape from his very real hell. The "sick man" is the poet, watching himself sink to the "axis" of despair and lust.

In "Recalling War" Graves did not offer a solution for "total wars." And in "Down" the "sick man" must continue to suffer. Similarly, in the ballad "Apples and Water" a mother explains to her daughter that

nothing can satisfy the soldiers on their way to the front lines. I quote only the fourth and fifth stanza:

'But, mother, see, they faint with thirst,
They march away to war.'
'Ay, daughter, these are not the first
And there will come yet more.

'There is no water can supply them
In western streams that flow;
There is no fruit can satisfy them
On orchard-trees that grow. (p. 25)

"Recalling War," "Down," and "Apples and Water" all share the theme of hopelessness. Not only is Western man doomed to endless wars, to "more boastful visions of despair," but the poet himself is doomed to suffer without hope. Though the soldiers' thirst in "Apples and Water" cannot be satisfied because they are doomed to a life of endless wars, the poet survived the war and is no longer a part of it. However, Graves' experiences in the trenches seem to have condemned him to live with a sense of personal doom for many years. Indeed, the presentiment of his own ruin or death continues in his poetry for the next forty years.

In 1921 Graves published a volume of poems, The Pier-Glass, which contains some of his most haunting and nightmarish stanzas. The title poem records the poet's ghost-like existence:

Lost manor where I walk continually
A ghost, though yet in woman's flesh and blood.
Up your broad stairs mounting with outspread fingers
And gliding steadfast down your corridors
I come by nightly custom to this room,
And even on sultry afternoons I come
Drawn by a thread of time-sunk memory.

Empty, unless for a huge bed of state
Shrouded with rusty curtains drooped awry
(A puppet theatre where malignant fancy

Peoples the wings with fear). At my right hand
 A ravelled bell-pull hangs in readiness
 To summon me from attic glooms above
 Service of elder ghosts; here, at my left,
 A sullen pier-glass, cracked from side to side,
 Scorns to present the face (as do new mirrors)
 With a lying flush but shows it melancholy
 And pale, as faces grow that look in mirrors.

Is there no life, nothing but the thin shadow
 And blank foreboding, never a wainscot rat
 Rasping a crust? Or at the window-pane
 No fly, no bluebottle, no starveling spider?
 The windows frame a prospect of cold skies
 Half-merged with sea, as at the first creation--
 Abstract, confusing welter. Face about,
 peer rather in the glass once more, take note
 Of self, the grey lips and long hair dishevelled,

Sleep-staring eyes. Ah, mirror, for Christ's love
 Give me one token that there still abides
 Remote--beyond this island mystery.
 So be it only this side Hope, somewhere,
 In streams, on sun-warm mountain pasturage--
 True life, natural breath; not this phantasma. (pp. 23-24)

The "lost manor" is an actual place, but it is also a metaphor of the poet's inward feeling. Everything in the "manor" reflects the poet's lifeless existence. The general gloomy atmosphere in the "manor," however, suggests not only the poet's ghost-like life, but also the terrible attraction of the "manor." In other words, the poet is drawn to this "manor," this place of gloom and dread by something within himself, "by a thread of time-sunk memory." As in "Down," the poet is drawn and captivated by an inward and primitive force. However, the force remains lost and an "island mystery." The primitive without and the primitive within keep the poet a flesh and blood ghost. Outside the "manor" the poet sees only more of the same confused and lost, or primitive world that is within himself: "The windows frame a prospect of cold skies/

Half-merged with sea, as at the first creation--". In the "lost manor" within himself, the poet sees only "blank foreboding," the presentiment of his own death.

"The Pier-Glass" ends with a plea for "natural" life; but the poem suggests no solution to the poet's "phantasma." Nevertheless, it expresses the poet's desire for a less ghost-like existence. "The Castle," however, does not even express the desire for a less gloomy life:

Walls, mounds, enclosing corrugations
Of darkness, moonlight on dry grass.
Walking this courtyard, sleepless, in fever;
Planning to use--but by definition
There's no way out, no way out--
Rope ladders, baulks of timber, pulleys,
A rocket whizzing over the walls and moat--
Machines easy to improvise.

No escape,
No such thing; to dream of new dimensions,
Cheating checkmate by painting the king's robe
So that he slides like a queen;
Or to cry, 'Nightmare, nightmare!'
Like a corpse in the cholera-pit
Under a load of corpses;
Or to run the head against these blind walls,
Enter the dungeon, torment the eyes
With apparitions chained two and two,
And go frantic with fear--
To die and wake up sweating by moonlight
In the same courtyard, sleepless as before. (p. 51)

The poem even denies the possibility of escape by dreaming. The poet is doomed to endure fear, agony, fever, and death. He does not die and he does not live; he wakes up after each death, only to experience another death in the "same courtyard, sleepless as before." The poem does not suggest an escape or a solution to the poet's ever-recurring experience of fear, death and nightmare; indeed, the poem emphatically declares that there is "no way out," "no escape."

The above poems reflect in various degrees the poet's emotional stresses, his sense of doom and the recurring experience of spiritual death of the post-War years. Together with the intensely emotional poems, Graves published others that reflect his acceptance of fear, despair, and seeming death. "Rocky Acres," for example, does not deny fear and death; they are an accepted part of the poet's mental acres:

This is a wild land, country of my choice,
 With harsh craggy mountain, moor ample and bare.
 Seldom in these acres is heard any voice
 But voice of cold water that runs here and there
 Through rocks and lank heather growing without care.
 No mice in the heath run, no song-birds fly
 For fear of the buzzard that floats in the sky.

He soars and he hovers, rocking on his wings,
 He scans his wide parish with a sharp eye.
 He catches the trembling of small hidden things,
 He tears them in pieces, dropping them from the sky;
 Tenderness and pity the heart will deny,
 Where life is but nourished by water and rock--
 A hardy adventure, full of fear and shock.

Time has never journeyed to this lost land,
 Crakeberry and heather bloom out of date,
 The rocks jut, the streams flow singing on either hand,
 Careless if the season be early or late,
 The skies wander overhead, now blue, now slate;
 Winter would be known by his cutting snow
 If June did not borrow his armour also.

Yet this is my country, beloved by me best,
 The first land that rose from Chaos and the Flood,
 Nursing no valleys for comfort or rest.
 Trampled by no shod hooves, bought with no blood.
 Sempiternal country whose barrows have stood
 Stronghold for demigods when on earth they go.
 Terror for fat burghers on far plains below. (p. 7)

The threat of death in the poet's land is represented by the "buzzard." However, the poet chose this land: he is willing to live with fear and the constant threat of death. The general landscape matches the harshness

of poems such as "Down" and "The Castle." The land is rough, barren, uncomfortable, and primitive. It is timeless, lost, natural--the "first land" that emerged from "Chaos and the Flood." There are no "shod hooves," and it has not been fought over like Europe. The "barrows" of this land suggest the pre-historic graves of Upper Paleolithic peoples in England. The "barrows" are also the graves of the "demigods," the sacred Kings of the Old Religion. The kings or "demigods" are a terror to "fat burghers" because they represent the primitive fierceness of the Old Religion: sacrificial murder and magic, lust and fear, love and death. The "demigods" are also the gods of the Old Religion, not yet dead, haunting and terrifying the modern bourgeois world. Since the old gods survived time, they rightly belong to a "sempiternal country."

The country that Graves describes in "Rocky Acres" is the land around Harlech, but the country is also the land of Graves' mind. The poem reflects the poet's resolve not to find easy solutions to despair and death. The "phantasma" of the 1920's and the powerful emotions of fear and lust have their place in the poet's inward rocky acres. These inward acres are primitive, unspoiled, raw, "full of fear and shock."

"Rocky Acres" reflects Graves' attraction to the primitive gods of the Old Religion. The poem "Outlaws" also reflects this attraction and suggests that Graves met the old gods in his own tortured body and mind:

Owls--they whinny down the night;
 Bats go zigzag by.
 Ambushed in shadow beyond sight
 The outlaws lie.

Old gods, tamed to silence, there
 In the wet woods they lurk,
 Greedy of human stuff to snare
 In nets of murk.

Look up, else your eye will drown
 In a moving sea of black;
 Between the tree-tops, upside down,
 Goes the sky-track.

Look up, else your feet will stray
 Into the ambushade
 Where spider-like they trap their prey
 With webs of shade.

For though creeds whirl away in dust,
 Faith dies and men forget,
 These aged gods of power and lust
 Cling to life yet--

Old gods almost dead, malign,
 Starving for unpaid dues:
 Incense and fire, salt, blood and wine
 And a drumming muse,

Banished to woods and a sickly moon,
 Shrunk to mere bogey things,
 Who spoke with thunder once at noon
 To prostrate kings:

With thunder from an open sky
 To warrior, virgin, priest,
 Bowing in fear with a dazzled eye
 Toward the dread East--

Proud gods, humbled, sunk so low,
 Living with ghosts and ghouls,
 And ghosts of ghosts and last year's snow
 And dead toadstools. (pp. 8-9)

For the poet of the 1920's the "aged gods of power and lust" certainly were not dead. The ancient power of fear is the theme either directly or indirectly in such poems as "The Castle" and "The Pier-Glass." The poem "Down," for example, reflects the terrible power of lust, against which the poet is helpless. The "gods" live with ghosts, but so does the poet; indeed, he lives a ghost-like existence himself; however, though

the gods are "malign," the poet accepts the "gods" or "demigods" as inevitable figures in his mental and emotional landscape. Early in his life Graves recognized that "creeds" and "faith" are impermanent, the ancient "gods of power and lust" and a "drumming muse" are not, though banished as "bogey things" to the nursery room and to the remote countryside, inhabited by ignorant peasants.

Graves' poems of this period offer few ways out of the life of fear and shock. "The Cool Web," however, seems to represent a possible way:

Children are dumb to say how hot the day is,
How hot the scent is of the summer rose,
How dreadful the black wastes of evening sky,
How dreadful the tall soldiers drumming by.

But we have speech, to chill the angry day,
And speech, to dull the rose's cruel scent.
We spell away the overhanging night,
We spell away the soldiers and the fright.

There's a cool web of language winds us in,
Retreat from too much joy or too much fear:
We grow sea-green at last and coldly die
In brininess and volubility.

But if we let our tongues lose self-possession,
Throwing off language and its watery clasp
Before our death, instead of when death comes,
Facing the wide glare of the children's day,
Facing the rose, the dark sky and the drums,
We shall go mad no doubt and die that way. (p. 45)

Language is a bulwark against fear; it keeps us from emotional extremes. But children endure raw experience as the poet endured the pain of the trenches and the post-War life of shock and fear. We who have speech practice self-deception; we spell the fear away and thus keep our sanity. The solution, then, to emotional extremes is to use language to spell

them away, that is to say, the poet's solution to his life of shock and fear is to use language--the writing of poems--if he is willing to deceive himself. But this is no real solution. If he is not willing to deceive himself, he flirts with madness. In other words, the poet, Robert Graves, lived with the constant threat of madness, for he did not spell away the soldiers, the despair, the fear, the night, and the spiritual death of the post-War years.

The late 1920's and the 1930's belong to a transitional period in Graves' poetry. The realistic expressions of lust, doom, and spiritual death of the previous period give way to more traditional means of expressing these emotions and conditions. "The Succubus," for example, expresses the poet's lust by means of the traditional and popular succubus:

Thus will despair
 In ecstasy of nightmare
 Fetch you a devil-woman through the air,
 To slide below the sweated sheet
 And kiss your lips in answer to your prayer
 And lock her hands with yours and your feet with her feet.

Yet why does she
 Come never as longed-for beauty
 Slender and cool, with limbs lovely to see,
 (The bedside candle guttering high)
 And toss her head so the thick curls fall free
 Of halo'd breast, firm belly and long, slender thigh?

Why with hot face,
 With paunched and uddered carcase,
 Sudden and greedily does she embrace,
 Gulping away your soul, she lies so close,
 Fathering brats on you of her own race?
 Yet is the fancy grosser than your lusts were gross? (p. 72)

The poet's feeling of hopelessness evokes in his nightmare not a "beauty," the answer to his despair, but the succubus, who also represents the poet's

"lusts." Though the poet hopes for the "longed-for beauty" who could dispel his despair, he cannot escape his own gross "lusts," which are stronger than his hope. The "beauty" not only seems to represent the poet's hope or prayer against despair but also love that is free from the threat of despair and the "soul" gulping "lusts," the succubus or female demon who sucks the blood of travelers and sleeps with the unwary. The last line of the poem suggests that the "fancy," the succubus, is an adequate means of expressing the poet's lusts.

"The Christmas Robin" is another example of the transitional poems of the 1930's:

The snows of February had buried Christmas
 Deep in the woods, where grew self-seeded
 The fir-trees of a Christmas yet unknown,
 Without a candle or a strand of tinsel.

Nevertheless when, hand in hand, plodding
 Between the frozen ruts, we lovers paused
 And 'Christmas trees!' cried suddenly together,
 Christmas was there again, as in December.

We velveted our love with fantasy
 Down a long vista-row of Christmas trees,
 Whose coloured candles slowly guttered down
 As grandchildren came trooping round our knees.

But he knew better, did the Christmas robin--
 The murderous robin with his breast aglow
 And legs apart, in a spade-handle perched:
 He prophesied more snow, and worse than snow. (p. 80)

The "fantasy" and the happiness of the lovers is threatened by the "murderous robin," who "prophecied . . . more than snow." The "fantasy" of the lovers assumes that the happiness of Christmas can be prolonged beyond the normal Christmas season. Moreover, the lovers assume that their own happiness is permanent. The "fantasy" itself assumes that the lovers

will be lovers for many seasons: they see "a long vista-row of Christmas trees." The "grandchildren" also suggest permanent love between the lovers.

The "Christmas robin" brings a note of pessimism to the lovers' happiness. The "robin" is the New Year Robin, the God of the Waxing Year or Spirit of the New Year.⁴ Eventually the God of the Waning Year will murder the "robin." In popular English Yuletide superstition Robin in turn always hunted and hanged the Gold Crest Wren, the Spirit of the Old Year. (The Robin and the Wren are also known as Belin and Bran.) Since the poet identifies himself with the God of the Waxing Year, the "robin" "prophecied" that the lovers' love is doomed, for the woman will choose the robin's, or the poet's rival before the next Christmas.

To sum up. By evoking the Yuletide superstition, Graves enlarges the meaning of the poem to say that the lovers' love is doomed to be impermanent, that the woman will forsake her present lover for another, that the poet is doomed to be betrayed, and that he will suffer a symbolic death, the "worse than snow." In "The Christmas Robin" Graves clearly uses a traditional way of expressing the inconstancy of love.

"The Christmas Robin" introduces another feature of the transitional period. During the early 1920's few of Graves' poems dealt with love. Beginning roughly in 1930, love becomes the most prominent theme of his poetry. (To be sure, poems of the 1920's such as "A Lover Since Childhood," "Song of Contrariety," and "Sullen Moods" deal with love, but they are the exception rather than the rule.) To be more precise, the theme of love usually ends in the theme of loss of love. In other

⁴Unless otherwise noted, all mythological information used in this chapter is found in The White Goddess.

words, Graves' sense of doom continues to manifest itself in the context of the theme of love as in "The Christmas Robin." The "transitoriness" of war becomes the transitoriness of love. "Vanity," for example, is a general statement of the inevitable loss of love in all love relationships:

Be assured, the Dragon is not dead
But once more from the pools of peace
Shall rear his fabulous green head.

The flowers of innocence shall cease
And like a harp the wind shall roar
And the clouds shake an angry fleece.

'Here, here is certitude,' you swore,
'Below this lightning-blasted tree.
Where once it struck, it strikes no more.

'Two lovers in one house agree.
The roof is tight, the walls unshaken.
As now, so must it always be.'

Such prophecies of joy awaken
The toad who dreams away the past
Under your hearth-stone, light forsaken,

Who knows that certitude at last
Must melt away in vanity--
No gate is fast, no door is fast--

That thunder bursts from the blue sky,
That gardens of the mind fall waste,
That fountains of the heart run dry. (p. 59)

The dragon, Graves defines, in the poem "Mermaid, Dragon, Fiend," as "Thunderclaps of man's despair/ In mid-whirl of mental storms."⁵ The "Dragon" of "Vanity" also represents the "mid-whirl of mental storms," which rear their heads from the "pools" of mental peace. A presumptuous statement such as "'Here, here is certitude,'" inevitably awakens the "toad" who

⁵Collected Poems, 1961, p. 51.

knows that there is no escape from the "Dragon," from the "thunder" or despair in joy or "blue sky," from the decay of the "gardens" or paradises of the mind, and from the "dry" or loveless heart itself. The sure and absolute love of lovers happens only once, for lightning never strikes the same tree twice. Love must be confident and absolute, but "no door is fast" and no love is permanent. The "gate" and "door" recall the "no escape" of "The Castle," in which the poet dies only to wake up "In the same courtyard, sleepless as before."

"Vanity" suggests a second level of meaning. The "Dragon" may also be The Serpent of Wisdom, the God of the Waning Year, the poet's rival; and, of course, the appearance of the poet's rival ends the Muse's love for the poet. The "harp" suggests the skeleton of a stranded whale through which the "wind shall roar." Traditionally, the skeleton represents Rahab, the Goddess of the Sea, who is also the Guardian of the Hebrew Sheol, the land of death. The "lightning blasted" tree is the oak, traditionally the tree to which the sacred king is tied at his sacrificial death. The oak-tree, then, suggests the death of the poet at the summer solstice. His death marks the end of his absolute love relationship with the Goddess of midsummer. The "toad" is a familiar item of the English Witch Cult. The Witches' deity is, of course, Hecate, the Goddess of Death-in-Life. The poet, then, as sacred king of the first half of the year, is ritually murdered at midsummer and goes to his death to the Universal Mother or Goddess of Death-in-Life. The poem combines traditional content or means of expression with the theme of loss of love. How far the poet intended the second level of meaning to work in his poem is debatable. However, words such as "Dragon," "harp," and "toad" carry heavy connotative meanings of which Graves surely is not ignorant.

"The Foreboding," though it uses no traditional means of expressing the loss of love, records the poet's traditional paranoiac vision of his rival or weird:

Looking by chance in at the open window
 I saw my own self seated in his chair
 With gaze abstracted, furrowed forehead,
 Unkempt hair.

I thought that I had suddenly come to die,
 That to a cold corpse this was my farewell,
 Until the pen moved slowly upon paper
 And tears fell.

He had written a name, yours, in printed letters:
 One word on which bemusedly to pore--
 No protest, no desire, your naked name,
 Nothing more.

Would it be tomorrow, would it be next year?
 But the vision was not false, this much I knew;
 And I turned angrily from the open window
 Aghast at you.

Why never a warning, either by speech or look,
 That the love you cruelly gave me could not last?
 Already it was too late: the bait swallowed,
 The hook fast. (p. 122)

The "his" is the poet's other self or rival. The poet sees himself already dead because the rival is his traditional murderer. When the poet saw himself seated in the rival's chair, he knew that his own death was imminent. However, the rival only wrote the Muse's name, thus forewarning the poet of his inevitable death and the loss of the Muse's love. The rival, by naming the Muse, shows that he too, loves the same woman. The poet's paranoiac vision was not false, but he did not know when he would suffer the loss of love and his death. That the Muse gives no warning of her ultimate betrayal is typical of her character. Her love is wild and unpredictable. And the poet, like a baited fish, must endure

her cruelty, her inconstancy. "The Foreboding" combines the theme of the poet's symbolic or spiritual death with the theme of love or loss of love. Though the poem does not contain a traditional superstition as does "The Christmas Robin," it records an ancient vision. In The White Goddess Graves writes:

The Theme, briefly, is the antique story, which falls into thirteen chapters and an epilogue, of the birth, life, death and resurrection of the God of the Waxing Year; the central chapters concern the God's losing battle with the God of the Waning Year for love of the capricious and all-powerful Threefold Goddess, their mother, bride and layer-out. The poet identifies himself with the God of the Waxing Year and his Muse with the Goddess; the rival is his blood-brother, his other self, his weird. All true poetry--true by Housman's practical test--celebrates some incident or scene in this very ancient story, and the three main characters are so much a part of our racial inheritance that they not only assert themselves in poetry but recur on occasions of emotional stress in the form of dreams, paranoiac visions and delusions. (p. 11)

The two main features of the transitional period--traditional means of expression and the increasing prominence of the love theme--gradually supplant the despair and fear derived from the trenches of the First World War. In the complex and difficult poem, "The Terraced Valley," the poet records his discovery of a new region:

In a deep thought of you and concentration
I came by hazard to a new region:
The unnecessary sun was not there,
The necessary earth lay without care--
For more than sunshine warmed the skin
Of the round world that was turned outside-in.

Calm sea beyond the terraced valley
Without horizon easily was spread,
As it were overhead,
Washing the mountain-spurs behind me:
The unnecessary sky was not there,
Therefore no heights, no deeps, no birds of the air.

Neat outside-inside, neat below-above,
 Hermaphrodizing love.
 Neat this-way-that-way and without mistake:
 On the right hand could slide the left glove.
 Neat over-under: the young snake
 Through an unyielding shell his path could break.
 Singing of kettles, like a singing brook,
 Made out-of-doors a fireside nook.

But you, my love, where had you then your station?
 Seeing that on this counter-earth together
 We go not distant from each other;
 I knew you near me in that strange region,
 So searched for you, in hope to see you stand
 On some near olive-terrace, in the heat,
 The left-hand glove drawn on your right hand,
 The empty snake's egg perfect at your feet--

But found you nowhere in the wide land,
 And cried disconsolately, until you spoke
 Immediate at my elbow, and your voice broke
 This trick of time, changing the world about
 To once more inside-in and outside-out. (pp. 136-137)

The first stanza links together the "you," the "new region," and the "necessary earth." The "region" belongs to the poet's Muse, who is associated with the earth. She warms the poet; however, her "region" is turned "outside-in": in her world the normal order of relationships is suspended. The Muse, then, creates her own warmth in her "region." In such a place the sun is obviously unnecessary. Moreover, since the sun is the common symbol of the sacred king's life, it represents the male principle. In short, the region that the poet came to belongs to a time and place where only Woman or the Muse is necessary.

The second stanza develops further the "outside-in" notion. In the Muse's "region" there are no dimensions; and, of course, since there is no sun, the sky also becomes unnecessary. The normal signposts of the natural world are absent from her "region."

The third stanza identifies the Muse. In her "region" hermaphroditic love is the rule, suggesting that the Muse is the Creatrix; she is self-creating and independent of male tutelage. In this all-female and self-creating atmosphere miracles seem possible: the right hand could fit the left glove, and the "snake" could pierce the egg shell without breaking it. The "snake" is the Creatrix, who is able to hatch out herself with her own warmth, without the aid of the sun and without breaking the egg shell. In other words, the poet came to a miraculous region; indeed, the birth of the Creatrix is the miraculous event; she is her own event. (In European myths the Creatrix has many names: Eurynome, Isis, Night, and Astarte.) The poet, then, is in a region that belongs to the very beginning of the Creatrix, to a time before the visible creation of the universe. In other words, the poet is saying that the self-creating power of miraculous love that is also the Creatrix came first in the order of creation. The visible universe is sustained by the power of miraculous love, the Creatrix herself. She is therefore perfect or without "mistake."

The fourth stanza clarifies the preceding one. The poet naturally asks where the Creatrix had her "station." The Creatrix has five stations: Birth, Initiation, Consummation, Repose, and Death. These stations of the year represent the solar year or the five stations of the sun's progress through the sky. Since the "sun" and "sky" are not in this strange region," the Creatrix has no station. The "new region" clearly belongs to a time before the visible creation of the universe. And since time is reckoned by the sun's movements, time does not exist in this region. The poet and his Muse or Creatrix are not distant from

each other on her "counter-earth." The poet hopes to see her; he hopes for the miracle of her birth. The last stanza, of course, introduces the Creatrix's voice, and the poet's hope is fulfilled.

The glove and snake of the fourth stanza suggest that the miraculous event of the Creatrix's birth was not only a possibility as in the third stanza, but was an actuality. The movement of the "left-hand glove" to the "right hand" indicates the direction of growth. The left hand is the sinister hand, the hand of destructive magic and decay. And since the moon, the most ancient symbol of the Muse, travels from left to right, the movement of the "left hand glove" to the right hand is beneficent, or fertile, or creative. (A waxing moon is the best time for planting.) That the "left-hand glove" is on the Muse's right hand suggests again that she is the fertile, creative power of love. Moreover, she has hatched from the now "empty snake's egg perfect" at her feet. In short, the Creatrix's birth was a miracle. She was born without the aid of the sun, the male principle--the normal time period of gestation. The poem is described as a "trick of time" because it is the result of "analeptic" thought, the recovery of lost events by a suspension of time.⁶ The event is the Creatrix, the power of miraculous and self-creating love. Since the "out-of-doors" is a "fireside nook," the Muse's own "region" is the proper home of the poet. Love is the poet's proper theme.

"The Terraced Valley" reflects a change in Graves' poetry. The "new region" is the power of love, which becomes the dominant theme of his poetry. However, the Muse is the White Goddess, the ancient power

⁶The White Goddess, p. 376.

of lust and terror, love and death. The theme of doom and symbolic death does not rule out the theme of love; it is part of the love theme. The last stanza of "End of Play," for example, states that love survives, but only under the ancient dread of the sacrificial axe:

Yet love survives, the word carved on a sill
Under antique dread of the headsman's axe;
It is the echoing mind, as in the mirror
We stare on our dazed trunks at the block kneeling. (p. 143)

The stanza combines the post-War theme of doom and symbolic death with the theme of love. The two themes, however, can be expressed properly only by the ancient mythological language of Europe. And that language--the traditional means of expression--already used in a limited way in "The Succubus" and "The Christmas Robin," is inspired by the White Goddess herself.

CHAPTER II

THE CRUEL GODDESS, MYTH, AND POETRY

The twenty years following roughly 1940 were Graves' most productive ones. During this period he published King Jesus (1946), The White Goddess (1948), and The Greek Myths (1955). The White Goddess is the most important book of the three. In it Graves relates the true theme of poetry, the ancient rites of the Goddess, and the poet's love for her. "The Terraced Valley" reflects the poet's discovery of the White Goddess as the embodiment of the power of creative love; however, in The White Goddess Graves writes not only about her creative love, but also about her destructive power. She creates and destroys with equal passion; nevertheless, the poet continues to love her even as she destroys him.

The poems that begin this period continue the tone of discovery initiated in "The Terraced Valley." In "A Love Story," for example, the poet discovers a past mistake:

The full moon easterly rising, furious,
Against a winter sky ragged with red;
The hedges high in snow, and owls raving--
Solemnities not easy to withstand:
A shiver wakes the spine.

In boyhood, having encountered the scene,
I suffered horror: I fetched the moon home,
With owls and snow, to nurse in my head
Throughout the trials of a new Spring,
Famine unassuaged.

But fell in love, and made a lodgement
Of love on those chill ramparts.
Her image was my ensign: snows melted,
Hedges sprouted, the moon tenderly shone,
The owls thrilled with tongues of nightingale.

These were all lies, though they matched the time,
 And brought me less than luck: her image
 Warped in the weather, turned beldamish.
 Then back came winter on me at a bound,
 The pallid sky heaved with a moon-quake.

Dangerous it had been with love-notes
 To serenade Queen Famine.
 In tears I recomposed the former scene,
 Let the snow lie, watched the moon rise, suffered the owls,
 Paid homage to them of unevent. (p. 151)

The first stanza evokes the natural symbols of the Death-goddess Hecate. The "red" sky suggests blood; the "snow" and "owls raving" reflect the Goddess' vicious mood. These "solemnities" attest to Hecate's unseen presence. The poet experienced a "frisson," the shudder provoked by supernatural experiences.

In the second stanza the scene is in the poet's boyhood. The "solemnities," the horror of winter and of lack, continued to exert their power upon the poet, even though spring succeeded winter. The spirit of lack was stronger than the spirit of plenty.

The third stanza relates how the poet fell in love with a woman and used her image as a foothold and defense against Hecate, the lack and horror of winter. The miraculous power of love easily banished the "solemnities": the hedges sprouted and the "owls" sang like nightingales. But the transformed scene was a lie because the poet attempted to use the power of love to placate Hecate, the power of lack, death, and horror. The beloved's image became her opposite, the hag of winter, Hecate. And, of course, the "solemnities" came back.

The final stanza suggests that the poet's mistake was to use the miraculous power of love as a bulwark against Hecate or "Queen Famine." The last two lines clarify the proper attitude toward Hecate: silent suf-

fering, recognition, and the acceptance of what must be. In "A Love Story" the poet discovers that love is not an escape from horror, death, or lack, but part of the landscape of winter, of Hecate.

In "A Love Story," the poet discloses that Hecate is part of his love relationship with the Muse. Indeed, Hecate is the dark aspect of the Muse. And in "To Sleep" he discovers that his love for the Muse has not been whole:

The mind's eye sees as the heart mirrors:
Loving in part, I did not see you whole,
Grew flesh-enraged that I could not conjure
A whole you to attend my fever-fit
In the doubtful hour between a night and day
And be Sleep that had kept so long away.

Of you sometimes a hand, a brooch, a shoe
Wavered beside me, unarticulated--
As the vexed insomniac dream-forges;
And the words I chose for your voice to speak
Echoed my own voice with its dry creak.

Now that I love you, now that I recall
All scattered elements of will that swooped
By night as jealous dreams through windows
To circle above the beds like bats,
Or as dawn-birds flew blindly at the panes
In curiosity rattling out their brains--

Now that I love you, as not before,
Now you can be and say, as not before:
The mind clears and the heart true-mirrors you
Where at my side an early watch you keep
And all self-bruising heads loll into sleep. (p. 157)

In the past, the poet had been presumptuous. He dared to speak in the Muse's name even though he did not love her wholly. The demons responsible for his presumptuousness are the poet's "elements of will," which are jealous of his love for the Muse and reckless like the "dawn-birds." The poet's will, then, kept him from loving wholly, kept the Muse fragmentary,

and kept the poet from truly speaking in her voice. The nature of the poet's will is expressed by the actions of the "bats" and "dawn-birds." His will is predatory, futile, and self-destructive. In the third Oxford lecture "The Personal Muse" Graves declares that "a poet has only one choice: to refrain from exploiting a bovine will-power--from forcing events to adopt intellectually conceived, and therefore unnatural, and therefore disastrous, patterns; and, instead, learn from his Muse how to cultivate an intuitive certitude about the fortunate course of whatever he feels impelled to do."¹ In the poem the poet discovers the destructiveness of his will and the unnaturalness of following it instead of his intuition. Indeed, "To Sleep" acknowledges the supremacy of the heart over the head: "The mind's eye sees as the heart mirrors."

The above two poems reflect a new understanding of love. The poet must not use love as a bulwark against the dark side of the Muse. Horror is not alien to the poet-Muse relationship. He must not exercise his will power in order to see the truth, but instead love the Muse wholly. He must not deny the superiority of the heart to the mind, intuition to intellect, emotion to reason, the natural to the unnatural.

Other poems reflect the newly discovered region of love. "Language of the Seasons" and "Mid-Winter Waking," for example, dwell on the dark and bright aspects of love, already discovered in "A Love Story." But these poems do not use the language of myth. Though the theme of the poet as sacred king is foreshadowed in such poems as "The Foreboding" and "The Christmas Robin," the poems of the forties and fifties relate that

¹Oxford Addresses, p. 77.

theme in a mythological language, derived in part from Graves' studies of ancient European myths. Some of the poems of this period leave out the poet's personal love-relationship with the Muse and concentrate on the life, death, and resurrection of the king or Spirit of the Year; some are restorations of misunderstood or fragmentary texts, and others are translations. But regardless of the poems' origins, they all reflect Graves' abiding belief that the poet must love the one and only Muse or White Goddess, who alone is capable of inspiring true poems.

"To Juan at the Winter Solstice" offers the best introduction to the poems written in the language of myth:

There is one story and one story only
That will prove worth your telling,
Whether as learned bard or gifted child;
To it all lines or lesser gauds belong
That startle with their shining
Such common stories as they stray into.

Is it of trees you tell, their months and virtues,
Or strange beasts that beset you,
Of birds that croak at you the Triple will?
Or of the Zodiac and how slow it turns
Below the Boreal Crown,
Prison of all true kings that ever reigned?

Water to water, ark again to ark,
From woman back to woman;
So each new victim treads unfalteringly
The never altered circuit of his fate,
Bringing twelve peers as witness
Both to his starry rise and starry fall.

Or is it of the Virgin's silver beauty,
All fish below the thighs?
She in her left hand bears a leafy quince;
When with her right she crooks a finger, smiling,
How may the King hold back?
Royally then he barter life for love.

Or of the undying snake from chaos hatched,
 Whose coils contain the ocean,
 Into whose chops with naked sword he springs,
 Then in black water, tangled by the reeds,
 Battles three days and nights,
 To be spewed up beside her scalloped shore?

Much snow is falling, winds roar hollowly,
 The owl hoots from the elder,
 Fear in your heart cries to the loving-cup:
 Sorrow to Sorrow as the sparks fly upward.
 The log groans and confesses:
 There is one story and one story only.

Dwell on her graciousness, dwell on her smiling,
 Do not forget what flowers
 The great boar trampled down in ivy time.
 Her brow was creamy as the crested wave,
 Her sea-grey eyes were wild
 But nothing promised that is not performed. (pp. 175-176)

Juan is one of Graves' children. He was born at the winter solstice, and therefore the poem is dedicated to him. If Juan becomes a poet, he will tell only one story--the life, death, and resurrection of the Spirit of the Year, the Goddess' son and lover. Juan can tell this story as a "learned bard," as Graves is doing in the poem; or he can tell this story as a "gifted child," that is, intuitively, as Graves did in some of his poems prior to the 1940's. "To Juan at the Winter Solstice" itself tells several versions of the one story that is worth telling.

The trees of the second stanza stand for the letters of the Celtic Beth-Luis-Nion tree-alphabet. The month of each tree is as follows²:

Birch Dec. 24 to Jan. 20

Rowan Jan. 21 to Feb. 17

Ash Feb. 18 to Mar. 17

²Unless otherwise noted, all mythological information used in this chapter is found in The White Goddess.

Alder Mar. 18 to Apr. 14

Willow Apr. 15 to May 12

Hawthorn May 13 to June 9

Oak June 10 to July 7

Holly July 8 to Aug. 4

Hazel Aug. 5 to Sep. 1

Vine Sep. 2 to Sep. 29

Ivy Sep. 30 to Oct. 27

Dwarf Elder Oct. 28 to Nov. 24

Elder Nov. 25 to Dec. 22

The virtues of the trees are as follows:

The birch is the self-propagating birch, and therefore an appropriate tree to begin the New Year.

The rowan is the tree of life. It is also known as the quicken, and is therefore an appropriate tree to represent the gradual return of spring.

The ash is sacred to Poseidon. The ash is the tree of sea-power or water; it is an appropriate tree because this is the month of floods.

The alder does not decay and resists the corruptive power of water. The alder is the tree of fire, it represents the power of fire to free the earth from water. The tree makes good charcoal.

The willow is sacred to the Triple Moon-goddess. The orgiastic May Day revels come in the middle of the willow month. Since the willow grows near water, it is an appropriate tree to represent the magic dew that falls on May Day. The Moon-goddess is the giver of dew and moisture.

The hawthorn is the tree of enforced chastity; the hawthorn month is the time of preparation for the midsummer festival; it is unlucky to marry during this month.

The oak is the tree of endurance and triumph. On June 24 the oak-king is sacrificially burned alive. The Celtic year ends with the oak-month. It is divided into two halves with the second half beginning in July.

The holly belongs to the eighth month, and it is well suited to the month of the barley harvest, the time of increase. Eight is the number of increase. The holly-king, who had executed the oak-king at the summer solstice, now reigns until the winter solstice.

The hazel is the tree of wisdom. The hazel bears fruit after nine years; and nine is the sacred number of the Goddess, the source of all poetic wisdom.

The tenth tree is the vine. It is the tree of joy because the fruiting season produces berries from which wine is made.

The eleventh tree is the ivy. The ivy symbolizes resurrection because it grows spirally. The ivy also represents the end of the reign of the Gold Crest Wren, the Spirit of the Old Year. The wren nests in ivy.

The twelfth tree is the dwarf-elder, the tree of royalty and established power.

The thirteenth tree is the elder, the tree of doom. At the end of this month, on Dec. 22, the Gold Crest Wren or Spirit of the Old Year dies.

The Beth-Luis-Nion tree-alphabet has thirteen consonants, corresponding to the thirteen months. Each consonant is the first letter of the tree. For example, Beth (Birch) is the letter B; Luis (Rowan) is the letter

L, and so on. The consonants represent the sun's progress through the sky or its thirteen stations. This Celtic calendar is a lunar (28 days) calendar, and therefore it has thirteen months instead of the usual twelve. The calendar is obviously sacred to the Moon-goddess. Moreover, a woman's menstrual cycle usually ends every twenty-eight days, corresponding roughly to lunar time.

The five vowels of the Beth-Luis-Nion form a complementary seasonal sequence:

The first tree is the silver fir, the birth tree of Northern Europe. The tree has its station on the extra day after the winter solstice, Dec. 23. The day belongs to the birthday of the Divine Child, the Spirit of the New Year.

The second tree is the furze. Its station is at the spring equinox. It is an appropriate tree because the old prickles of the furze are burned to encourage new ones to sprout. The golden flowers of the furze represent the young sun in the spring.

The third tree is the red heather, associated with passion. It is the tree of the summer solstice; and it attracts bees and therefore represents the orgiastic aspect of the Goddess. The Goddess (Cybele) is a bee herself about whom the male drones swarm in midsummer. She emasculates the sacred king on heather-growing mountain tops as the queen bee emasculates the drone.

The fourth tree is the white poplar, the tree of the autumn equinox and therefore of old age.

The fifth tree is the yew, the death tree of Europe. The station of the yew comes on the eve of the winter solstice. The station marks the death of the sacred king.

The five vowels of the Beth-Luis-Nion correspond to the trees and their stations. Ailm (silver fir) is A; Onn (furze) is O; Ur (Heather) is U; Eadha (white poplar) is E; and Idho (yew) is I. The five vowels are expressive of the Goddess' five stations of the year: Birth, Initiation, Consummation, Repose, and Death. (The five stations or vowels of the tree alphabet recall the poet's question in "The Terraced Valley": "But you, my love, where had you then your station?") Since this calendar has an extra day, it was intercalated usually after the winter solstice; however, there are variations to this procedure. In his introduction to The Greek Myths Graves comments on several of them:

Thus the sun passed through thirteen monthly stages, beginning with the winter solstice when the days lengthen again after their long autumnal decline. The extra day of the terrestrial year, gained from the sideral year by the earth's revolution around the sun's orbit, was intercalated between the thirteenth and the first month, and became the most important day of the 365, the occasion on which the tribal Nymph chose the sacred king, usually the winner of a race, a wrestling match, or an archery contest. But this primitive calendar underwent modifications: in some regions the extra day seems to have been intercalated, not at the winter solstice, but at some other New Year--at the Candlemas cross-quarter day, when the first signs of spring are apparent; or at the spring equinox, when the sun is regarded as coming to maturity; or at midsummer; or at the rising of the Dog Star, when the Nile floods; or at the autumnal equinox, when the first rains fall.³

To return to the second stanza of "Juan." The "beasts" are the poet's various other selves, who often assume diabolical forms. And sometimes they are the various disguises of the poet's rival or weird. The "birds" are probably the owl and raven. The owl is sacred to Hecate; the raven can be identified with Bran, the Spirit of the Old Year. The two

³The Greek Myths, Vol. I (Baltimore: Penguin books, 1961), pp. 16-17.

birds announce the "Triple will," which demands that the king die at the end of his seasonal reign. The "Triple will" is woman in her divine aspect. In the White Goddess Graves explains why woman alone is divine:

It will be objected that man has as valid a claim to divinity as woman. That is true only in a sense; he is divine not in his single person, but only in his twinhood. As Osiris, the Spirit of the Waxing Year he is always jealous of his weird, Set, the Spirit of the Waning Year, and vice-versa; he cannot be both of them at once except by an intellectual effort that destroys his humanity, and this is the fundamental defect of the Apollonian or Jehovistic cult. Man is a demi-god: he always has either one foot or the other in the grave; woman is divine because she can keep both her feet always in the same place, whether in the sky, in the underworld, or on this earth. Man envies her and tells himself lies about his own completeness, and thereby makes himself miserable; because if he is divine she is not even a demi-goddess--she is a mere nymph and his love for her turns to scorn and hate.

Woman worships the male infant, not the grown man: it is evidence of her deity, of man's dependence on her for life. She is passionately interested in grown men, however, because the love-hate that Osiris and Set feel for each other on her account is a tribute to her divinity. She tries to satisfy both, but can only do so by alternate murder, and man tries to regard this as evidence of her fundamental falsity, not of his own irreconcilable demands on her. (pp. 106-107)

The last three lines of the second stanza concern the dead king's after-life. The "Boreal Crown" is the royal purgatory where the king awaits resurrection. This purgatory is in the extreme north, the quarter from which the sun never shines. The king is born at the winter solstice, when the sun is weakest; he is killed at the summer solstice, when the sun has attained its most northerly station. In the north he awaits resurrection. The "Boreal Crown," then, is his prison because when he dies he goes to the far north. The king is clearly a solar hero. The question marks in this poem reflect Graves questions to Juan. Graves is asking him which version of the one story he will tell.

The third stanza develops further the king's fate. "Water to water" means from birth to death and back to birth, from spring flood to spring flood. The interval between each spring includes the birth, death, and rebirth of the sun, which is the symbol of the king's life. The sequence "ark again to ark" refers to the New Year Vintage feast. The ark is a crescent-shaped moon-ship, containing sacrificial animals in honor of the Lady of the Wild Things. From ark to ark, then, means from New Year to New Year. From "woman back to woman" refers to woman in her divine aspect or the five stations of her year. The five vowels or stations reflect the Goddess' complete power over the king's life. The "victim" is the sacred king who must always repeat the same ever recurring cycle. The "twelve peers" are his attendants: each one stands for a month of the year. The "victim" or king completes the thirteenth month thus completing the tree or consonant seasonal sequence of the Beth-Luis-Nion calendar. The king's "starry rise" and "fall" refers to his ascension to, and his descension from, the Boreal Crown, his death and rebirth at the hands of the Universal Mother.

The Virgin of the fourth stanza is Aphrodite ("risen from sea-foam"). Since her temples were built by the sea, her symbolic fishtail is appropriate. And since silver is the traditional color of the moon, Aphrodite can be identified with the Moon-goddess Eurynome, who is also represented as a mermaid. The "quince" is an apple-like fruit. It is the king's passport to immortality, for if an apple or quince is halved cross-wise, each half shows a five-pointed star in the center. This five-pointed star recalls the Goddess' five stations or vowels, expressive of the sequence from birth to death and back to birth. The left hand is the

sinister hand with which the Goddess offers the king immortality at the expense of his life. Her right hand promises him love; and so like a true king he "barter[s] life for love."

The fifth stanza is yet another version of the same story. The "snake is Ophion of Greek mythology, identified in the poem with Homer's Oceanus, whose coils girdle the world. Ophion is the familiar Serpent of Wisdom, the poet's rival or God of the Waning Year. The king fights with his rival for the love of the Goddess, his mother, bride, and layer-out. The three days of his fight, then, refer to his transformations as child, son, and lover. As her child he is the Divine Child; as her son he grows to maturity; and as her lover he finally dies; but he is resurrected in the form of the Divine Child once more. That the king is "spewed up" suggests his rebirth from the Universal Mother. The "scalloped shore" belongs to Aphrodite because the scallop is sacred to her. (Botticelli's Birth of Venus represents her standing in a scallop-shell.)

The sixth stanza is concerned with the king's death. The "elder" month extends from November 25 to December 22, which is the day of the winter solstice and the king's death. The "owl" hoots from the "elder" because the owl is sacred to the Death-goddess Hecate, and therefore it prophesies the king's death. The "loving-cup" is a cup that contains a poison; it is a "loving cup" because the king dies for love of the Goddess. "Sorrow to sorrow" means that the king must repeat this love-ordeal each year. The "sparks" from the Yule "log" suggest the oak that is burned at Christmas. Robin or Belin escapes from the log and up the chimney to kill his rival Bran, the Gold Crest Wren. Moreover, the "log" also suggests Robin's death at the summer solstice; and tied to the oak log he confesses

that there is only one story--the life, death, and resurrection of the Spirit of the Year, the Goddess' son and lover. The summer solstice comes in the middle of the oak month.

The last stanza refers to the sacred king's death in the autumn. The "flowers" are the "lilies of the valley" or anemones that sprang up from the drops of blood that fell from Adonis' side when the wild boar killed him. Adonis is the harvest god Tammuz, the lover of the Syrian Aphrodite. The ivy month marks the time of the autumn harvest; and since October is the boar hunting season, the boar is a convenient symbol to represent the king's or Adonis' rival. Thus the Egyptian Set disguised as a boar murders Osiris, to whom the ivy is sacred. The "great boar," then, is the king's rival. The king in this version of the one story is a harvest king.

The "crested wave" is the ninth wave, traditionally the largest. The "crested wave" also suggests the autumn storms that bring whitecaps to the sea. Since nine is the number sacred to the Goddess, the "crested wave" is a fitting simile of the Goddess' "creamy" brow, which is "creamy," of course, because she is the White Goddess. Although the White Goddess is called by many names, she is always the same Goddess. Her eyes are "sea-grey" because she is also the Sea-goddess Aphrodite; and they are "wild" because she is also the Cretan Lady of the Wild Things. And she promises nothing to her lovers unless they perform--bring gifts to her, love her, and willingly die for her. Indeed, the poet advises Juan to dwell on her "graciousness" and on her "smiling," on her mercy and on her love. Though this last stanza is one more version of the one story, the meaning of the different versions is always the same. The god or king or poet always barter "life for love."

During the 1940's Graves wrote several poems that are restorations of fragmentary texts. "Amergin's Charm," for example, is a restoration from medieval Irish and Welsh variants. "The Battle of the Trees" and "The Song of Blodeuwedd" are restorations from the Welsh poem-medley, Cad C  deu, found in the Red Book or Hergest. These three poems are thoroughly discussed in The White Goddess. "The Allansford Pursuit," a restoration of a fragmentary seventeenth-century text, is a typical example of a restored poem that relates one more version of the true poetic Theme. The second stanza, for example, is representative of the poems mentions above:

O, I shall go into a hare
 With sorrow and sighing and mickle care,
 And I shall go in the Devil's name
 Aye, till I be fetch  d hame.
 --Hare, take heed of a bitch greyhound
 Will harry thee all these fells around,
 For here come I in Our Lady's name
 All but for to fetch thee hame.⁴

The pursuit is a dance performed by the North-country witches on their Sabbaths. The "hare" is hunted on May-eve; it represents the lecherous aspect of the Goddess. The hare is swift, prolific, and mates openly, and is therefore a fitting symbol of the Love-goddess who presides over the May-day celebrations. The witch mimicks the habits of a hare, and in that sense becomes a hare. Next, she assumes the role of the witches' Devil who applauds her transformation into a hare. After the Devil's applause, the witch comes "hame," meaning that she becomes herself again. Usually the "grey-hound" is the Devil, but in this poem the witch is assuming the role of pursuer. In other words, in her transformation into

⁴ Collected Poems (New York, 1955), p. 244.

a hare she is the pursued; and in her greyhound transformation she plays the part of the pursuer. The Lady is, of course, Hecate. Originally, the transformations followed the strict seasonal order: hare in the autumn, fish in winter, bird in the spring, and grain in the summer. These seasonal transformations represent the annual love chase. The Goddess chases her "victim" or lover in each of his seasonal transformations. As a greyhound bitch she chases the hare; as a bitch-otter the fish; as a falcon the bird; and as a black hen she easily kills her lover in his grain transformation. The color of the hen identifies her as the Goddess of Death-in-Life, Hecate.

"The Allansford Pursuit" retains some of the original mythic meaning, but the original seasonal sequence has been altered. The poem is one example of Graves' restorations and reflects his interest and understanding of the language of myth. Moreover, the poem reflects the true Theme of poetry. Though the Goddess loves her king or poet, at the end of his seasonal reign he must die. Like all her kings, he barterers "life for love."

One of Graves' best restorations and translations is the "Instructions to the Orphic Adept." The poem is in part translated from the Timpone Grande and Campagno Orphic tablets. It is another example of the language of myth. The third stanza is a convenient point of departure for a discussion of paradise, wisdom, intuition, and inspiration, all of which are related to the one poetic Theme. Though I quote only the third stanza, the poem should be read in its entirety:

To the right hand there lies a secret pool
 Alive with speckled trout and fish of gold;
 A hazel overshadows it. Ophion,
 Primaeval serpent straggling in the branches,
 Darts out his tongue. This holy pool is fed

By dripping water; guardians stand before it.
 Run to this pool, the pool of Memory,
 Run to this pool! (p. 201)

In the Beth-Luis-Nion alphabet the hazel is the tree of wisdom. The "speckled trout" probably are salmon. Each bright spot on their bodies was caused by the eating of a hazelnut. In The White Goddess Graves explains that the "Rennes Dinnshenchas, an important early Irish topographical treatise, describes a beautiful fountain called Connla's Well, near Tipperary, over which hung the nine hazels of poetic art which produced flowers and fruit (i.e., beauty and wisdom) simultaneously. As the nuts dropped into the well they fed the salmon swimming in it, and whatever number of nuts any of them swallowed, so many bright spots appeared on its siḡ body. All the knowledge of the arts and sciences was bound up with the eating of these nuts" (pp. 187-188). The "fish of gold" suggest poetic gold--truth and spiritual integrity. Since gold does not oxidize, it is a fitting symbol for poetic truth. The two kinds of fish, then, suggest that the pool is the pool of concentrated wisdom for the spiritually pure. The pool lies on the right hand; it is clearly beneficent or good. The Orphic adept, in a state of grace, drinks from this pool and experiences perfect wisdom, for the pool is also the "pool of Memory." Memory or Mnemosyne is the first of the Muses of the Greek triad. Mnemosyne typifies that one can have memory of the future as well as of the past; that is, one can experience perfect wisdom. Graves names the two memories proleptic thought and analeptic thought. In The White Goddess he clarifies these two methods of thought:

Most outstanding physicians diagnose the nature of a disease by the same means, though afterwards they may justify their diag-

noses by a logical examination of the symptoms. In fact, it is not too much to say that all original discoveries and inventions and musical and poetical compositions are the result of proleptic thought--the anticipation, by means of a suspension of time, of a result that could not have been arrived at by inductive reasoning --and of what may be called analeptic thought, the recovery of lost events by the same suspension. (p. 376)

Graves continues the discussion of time and describes intuition as memory of the future:

This need mean no more than that time, though a most useful convention of thought, has no greater intrinsic value than, say, money. To think in temporal terms is a very complicated and unnatural way of thinking, too; many children master foreign languages and mathematic theory long before they have developed any sense of time or accepted the easily disproved thesis that cause precedes effect. . . . In the poetic act, time is suspended and details of future experience often become incorporated in the poem, as they do in dreams. This explains why the first Muse of the Greek triad was named Mnemosyne, 'Memory': one can have memory of the future as well as of the past. Memory of the future is usually called instinct in animals, intuition in human beings. (pp. 376-377)

The experience of perfect wisdom is associated with visions of Paradise. In "The Poet's Paradise" Graves comments on various paradises:

Yet St. John's Apocalyptic Paradise is borrowed from chapters of the pre-Christian Book of Enoch, which are themselves based on the 'Eden' chapter of Ezekiel and Genesis; and these, again, on the Babylonian Paradise described in the Gilgamesh Epic and elsewhere. The Persians knew a similar Paradise; and their name for it, pari-daeza, yields the Syrian-Greek word paradeisos and the Hebrew pardess. Those middle-Eastern Paradises, so far back as the Sumerian, are reported as being delightful mountain-top gardens watered by a four-headed crystal river, their fruit-trees laden with flashing jewels; and a wise serpent always haunts them. Rare humans who enter Paradise while in a state of grace are granted 'perfect wisdom' by the Serpent--'knowledge of good and evil' means knowledge of 'all things that exist'--and only the herb of immortality is denied them. Thus Gilgamesh, having visited the jewelled Babylonian Paradise, dived to the sea-bottom and drew up a herb of immortality; but the Serpent took it from him, and he meekly resigned himself to death. Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden ('pleasure') by God lest they might discover and eat the fruit of

immortality; the Cherub, on guard at the gate thereafter with a flaming sword, is the very Serpent who gave them the fruit of knowledge.⁵

The "Ophion" of the "Instructions" and the "Serpent" of Paradise is the familiar Serpent of Wisdom, the Goddess' lover. Perhaps the "fish of gold" also belong in the vision of paradise, for the rivers in paradisaical visions are always stocked with fish. The third stanza of the "Instructions" suggests that the adept experienced the traditional vision of Paradise; and during the vision was granted "perfect wisdom" by the Serpent of Wisdom, Ophion. The meaning of the instructions reflects the Orphic's resolve to become immortal Lords of the Dead. The hazel was sacred to the Goddess of Death-in-Life, Persephone, for love of the Goddess makes a poet mad and go to his death, but in death he is made wise. In other words, the adept, by drinking from the pool of memory instead of from the pool of the cypress, the pool of rebirth, becomes wise at his death and escapes the endless cycle of death and rebirth; he becomes one of the immortal Lords of the Dead.

Graves' restoration and translation of the "Instructions to the Orphic Adept" reflects indirectly his own experiences of paradise, perfect wisdom, and the power of intuition. In "The Poet's Paradise" he records his vision of paradise, induced by the drug psilocybe.⁶ The vision lasted over four hours, and though it did not produce persons or historical scenes, Graves entered the "Garden of Delights": "Around me

⁵Oxford Addresses, pp. 113-114.

⁶This drug induced vision seems to be the basis of the poem "The Ambrosia of Dionysus and Semele" (p. 323).

lay a mountain-top Eden, with its jewel-bright trees, its flowers and its pellucid streams. And I experienced not only the bliss of innocence, but also the 'knowledge of good and evil'. . . . it was as if I had immediate access to all knowledge everywhere."⁷ Unlike a fellow adept whose hand turned corpse-like and became a skeleton, Graves' experience of the drug was wholly good. He points out that the drug-induced trance remains passive, the poetic trance active. Nevertheless, he writes that the "perfect sensory control which I could enjoy, confirmed, by analogy, my lifelong faith in the poetic trance: a world where words come to life and combine, under the poet's supra-conscious guidance, into inevitable and true rhythmic statements."⁸

In an essay⁹ Graves records an early experience of perfect wisdom, which suggests that a drug is not necessary to induce the sensation of perfect knowledge. This experience of wisdom as a child Graves describes as "a sudden infantile awareness of the power of intuition, the supra-logic that cuts out all routine processes of thought and leaps straight from problem to answer."¹⁰

Though the power of intuition--memory of past and future events--is active during the poetic act, poets demand inspiration, and only the ancient Muse can inspire poems:

⁷Oxford Addresses, p. 124.

⁸Ibid., pp. 127-127.

⁹"The Abominable Mr. Gunn," in !Catagrok! (London, 1956), pp. 151-155.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 153.

In my first lecture I distinguished between verse rhetoric, the product of cold reason, and true poetry, the result of an emotional trance. For some three thousand years, the inspiration that accompanies poetic trances has been ascribed to a character called the Muse; and although the meaning of 'Muse' has long been blurred by dishonest or facetious usage, what other word can replace it? The original Muse, or Mountain-goddess, whom the pre-Classical Greeks worshipped on Olympus, Helicon, Parnassus and elsewhere did not, of course, appear by candlelight in a poet's attic and guide his pen; the Muse-trance was a collective one induced at set lunar festivals. The Goddess rode her devotees very much as the voodoo gods of Haiti now ride theirs: causing them to chant and dance ecstatically; though first, no doubt, the tribal poet felt called upon to invoke the Goddess ceremoniously, and provide a ballad refrain--which is still a tribal poet's task in the South Cameroons and other remote parts of West Africa. In Greece by the eighth century B.C., invocation of the Muse had become a formality--a claim that Sons of Homer could entrance listeners with the harp in a palace courtyard as effectively as when stamp of foot and clap of hand beat out the Goddess' dance rhythm on the slopes of a mountain.¹¹

Graves continues the discussion, explaining that control by a supernatural power, that is, the Muse, still occurs today among poets. Indeed, he writes, "most anthropologists give primitive gods de facto recognition as the alleged sponsors of abnormal psychical phenomena, and welcome the public honours given to modern European poets . . . as a tacit acknowledgment of their control by a supernatural power."¹² The Muse, however, must have an agreed personality as well as supernatural power in order to exert her divine spell. In "To Juan at the Winter Solstice," for example, Graves depicted her traditional symbols, her agreed personality. In "The Personal Muse" he writes that "a deity must remain an idle abstraction, unless he or she has (to employ West African terms) a sunsum as well as a kra-kra meaning supernatural power, sunsum meaning an agreed personality. A sunsum becomes so notable that the devotee 'ridden' by, say, the goddess

¹¹ Oxford Addresses, pp. 57-58.

¹² Ibid., p. 58.

Ntoa or the god Odomankoma, uses certain traditional gestures, tones, and mannerisms at once recognized as the deity's own."¹³ In the same lecture Graves maintains that a poet's task is to recognize her agreed personality and supernatural power and always to write while under her influence. The poet who elects to worship Apollo is doomed to failure, for Apollo is the "patron of the intellect, not of intuitive truth; of metre, not of rhythm; of novelty, not of timelessness."¹⁴ Nevertheless, the distinguishing mark or test of a Muse-poet is not rhythm and timelessness in his poems but the accuracy of his vision of the White Goddess and of the island over which she rules. When one reads a true poem, he writes, "the hairs stand on end, the eyes water, the throat constricts, the skin crawls, and a shiver runs down the spine . . . because this is necessarily an invocation of the White Goddess, or Muse, the Mother of All Living, the ancient power of love and terror--the female spider or the queen-bee whose courtship means murder."¹⁵ The Muse is not only recognizable in true poems but also in the natural world. The skin crawls and the hair bristles "when owls hoot, the moon rides like a ship through scudding cloud, trees sway slowly together above a rushing waterfall . . . or when a peal of bells in frosty weather suddenly announces the birth of a New Year."¹⁶

A dedicated poet, Graves maintains, also recognizes the Goddess in his personal Muse, a woman gifted with the Goddess' kra. The personal Muse resists patriarchal education and cultivates her own intuitive wisdom. This woman is not the poet's wife but "the perpetual other woman, who teaches her poet how to cultivate her certitude and wisdom. The Goddess

¹³Ibid., pp. 58-59.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁶Ibid.

is incarnate in the personal Muse. And from the poet's obsessive love of his personal Muse proceed poems of trance "in which the ancient mythical elements assemble thickly."¹⁷

To sum up. The lecture reveals the need for a mythological language. The Goddess can be evoked only by her traditional symbols, gestures, and landscapes--her own traditional or mythological language. The Goddess would remain an abstraction if she had no "sunsum" and "kra." And the ancient Theme or one story--the life, death, and resurrection of her sons and lovers, associated with her worship, receives its force through the use of the language of myth. Since the poet identifies himself with the Goddess' sacred king or lover, his relationship with the Goddess also receives its strength through the use of her ancient language. This notion does not rule out the poet's contribution to the poem, but whenever a "poem reads memorable, this is almost always because a living Muse has directed its need and, however individual the poet's choice of words and rhythms, impressed her secret image on them."¹⁸

In The White Goddess Graves explains that the thesis of his book is "that the language of poetic myth anciently current in the Mediterranean and Northern Europe was a magical language bound up with popular religious ceremonies in honour of the Moon-goddess, or Muse, some of them dating from the Old Stone Age, and that this remains the language of true poetry--'true' in the nostalgic modern sense of 'the unimprovable original, not a synthetic substitute'" (p. vi). In the same book Graves associates supra-logical thought or intuition with the language of myth or poetry:

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁸ Collected Poems 1966, p. vii.

"There are two distinct and complementary languages: the ancient, intuitive language of poetry, rejected under Communism, merely misspoken elsewhere, and the more modern, rational language of prose, universally current. Myth and religion are clothed in poetic language; science, ethics, philosophy, and statistics in prose" (p. 533). True poetry is the result of an emotional trance, "a trance in which the emotions of love, fear, anger, or grief are profoundly engaged, though at the same time powerfully disciplined . . . and intuitive though reigns supralogically."¹⁹ And that poetry naturally uses the intuitive language of myth, the "magical language" in honor of the Moon-goddess or Muse. The "poetic trance" is not a theory of the unconscious. In the essay "The Poet in a Valley of Dry Bones" Graves explains that the "Vienna school of psychology presumes a conscious and unconscious mind as two separate and usually warring entities; but a poet cannot accept this. In the poetic trance, he has access not only to the primitive emotions and thoughts which lie stored in his childhood memory, but to all his subsequent experiences--emotional and intellectual."²⁰ The language of poetic myth, then, is intimately bound up with ceremonies in honor of the Moon-goddess or White Goddess--with the true poetic Theme: the life, death, and resurrection of the Goddess' sons and lovers. The dedicated Muse-poet who worships the White Goddess must use her "original" language, for without her language she does not recognize the poems written in her honor. Indeed, without her traditional ceremonies and gestures--her agreed personality retained in the mythological language--the Goddess herself remains an "idle abstraction." Moreover, a

¹⁹Oxford Addresses, p. 10.

²⁰Mammon, pp. 88-89.

a Muse-poet discovers this language intuitively in the poetic trance and consciously by a study of poetic myths. Graves' translations and restorations, then, reflect his conscious study of the mythological language associated with the White Goddess.

The poem "In Dedication" is not a restoration or translation but records Graves' search for the Goddess; and, of course, the poet's description of her is clothed in the ancient mythological language:

All saints revile her, and all sober men
 Ruled by the God Apollo's golden mean--
 In scorn of which I sailed to find her
 Whom I desired above all things to know
 Sister of the mirage and echo.

It was a virtue not to stay,
 To go my headstrong and heroic way
 Seeking her out at the volcano's head,
 Among pack ice, or where the track had faded
 Beyond the cavern of the seven sleepers:
 Whose broad high brow was white as any leper's,
 Whose eyes were blue, with rowan berry lips,
 With hair curled honey-coloured to white hips.

The sap of Spring in the young wood a-stir
 Will celebrate with green the Mother,
 And every song-bird shout awhile for her;
 But I am gifted, even in November
 Rawest of seasons, with so huge a sense
 Of her nakedly worn magnificence
 I forget cruelty and past betrayal,
 Careless of where the next bright bolt may fall.²¹

Saints, as representatives of Christianity and of asceticism, "revile" the Goddess because she is the Triple Goddess, the power of Brith, Life, and Death; she is woman in her divinity. Saints, of course, do not love woman, do not believe in the supremacy of woman over man, and do not believe in woman's intuitive wisdom. Men ruled by Apollo's "golden mean" also revile

²¹The White Goddess, p. 2.

her. Moderation in love or intellectual love makes little sense to the dedicated poet, who absolutely loves the Goddess; indeed, the Goddess demands the poet's whole love. The "sister of the mirage and echo" is the sister of vision and mockery, inspiration and death. The "mirage" refers to the "Silver Island" to which the sacred king goes at his death. The island mirage is caused by a poison, which the king receives just before he is murdered. As he dies, the "Silver Island" appears in his vision: he prophetically sees the "Silver Island" to which he goes at his death. The "sister" of death is life. In other words, the poet wants to know the Goddess of Life-in-Death. The word "echo" suggests a mountain region, the home of the Mountain-goddess or Muse.

The second stanza is an accurate portrayal of the Goddess. The "volcano's head" suggests the power of fire or passion; and the "ice" suggests the power of terror. The landscape clearly reflects the White Goddess or Mother of All Living, the power of love and terror. The "seven sleepers" are the Goddess' attendants. They, too, reflect the appearance of the Goddess. In The White Goddess Graves describes her as a "lovely, slender woman with a hooked nose, deathly pale face, lips red as rowan-berries, startlingly blue eyes and long fair hair" (p. 21). The word "leper" recalls the Goddess of Life and Death. In The White Goddess Graves comments on her ambivalent whiteness: "In one sense it is the pleasant whiteness of pearl barley, or a woman's body, or milk, or unsmutched snow; in another it is the horrifying whiteness of a corpse, or a spectre, or leprosy" (p. 485). The color "blue" reminds her devotees that she is the Goddess of Love and of the Sea. The "rowan-berry lips" recall the rowan of the Beth-Luis-Nion alphabet, in which the rowan is

the tree of life; and since the berries are red, and red is the food of dead heroes, the "rowan berries" describe the Goddess' power of resurrection; she is the Universal Mother who returns each spring. The "honey" recalls the Goddess as bee, her mid-summer aspect; as a bee she is the Goddess of Love and Death.

The "sap of Spring" in the last stanza is the Spirit of the Year, the God of the Waxing Year. The White Goddess appears as Mother Earth, and the poet credits her with truth. The Goddess' naked beauty and splendor suffice the poet, for even in November she gives him the gift of truth, so that he forgets past cruelties. The "bright bolt" is the bolt of death. Since the oak is the tree of midsummer and attracts lightning, the "bright bolt" refers to the poet's death at the summer solstice. However, he does not care if she betrays him again; her "magnificence" is all that he needs. The "bright bolt" also suggests the bolt of inspiration, which, like summer lightning, is unforeseeable and unpredictable. The Goddess, then, is the source of life and death, love and terror, inspiration and pain. It is this sense of the Goddess' "magnificence" that separates the dedicated poet from the Apollonian, who tells himself that her betrayal is evidence of her falsity. The dedicated poet loves her in spite of her cruelties.

"In Dedication" marks the return of the personal tone in Graves' poetry. "To Juan at the Winter Solstice" contains many versions of the one poetic theme, but the poet himself is not directly involved in the action of the poem. Similarly, the restorations and translations, though they reflect the one poetic theme and the mythological language associated with the Goddess, leave out the poet's own feeling and action. The theme of personal doom and spiritual death of the 1920's and 1930's returns to

the poems; moreover, that theme is now expressed by the mythological language used in "Juan," and in the restorations and translations. In the poem "Lament for Pasiphaë" the poet identifies himself with the sun, the symbol of the solar hero or king. The sun and the poet share a common grief: they both must die:

Dying sun, shine warm a little longer!
 My eye, dazzled with tears, shall dazzle yours,
 Conjuring you to shine and not to move.
 You, sun, and I all afternoon have laboured
 Beneath a dewless and oppressive cloud--
 A fleece now gilded with our common grief
 That this must be a night without a moon.
 Dying sun, shine warm a little longer!

Faithless she was not: she was very woman,
 Smiling with dire impartiality,
 Sovereign, with heart unmatched, adored of men,
 Until Spring's cuckoo with bedraggled plumes
 Tempted her pity and her truth betrayed.
 Then she who shone for all resigned her being,
 And this must be a night without a moon.
 Dying sun, shine warm a little longer! (p. 204)

The poet's appeal to the sun is an appeal to himself. The sun is the symbol of the king's life; and sundown symbolizes his death. The "truth" that the Spring "cuckoo" forced Pasiphaë to reveal is that the king must die. The European cuckoo deposits its eggs in other bird nests, and as the young cuckoo grows to maturity it pushes out the other fledglings. The cuckoo deceives other birds into raising its young by this habit. The "Spring's cuckoo" symbolizes the Goddess' own habit of deceiving her lovers. But the Goddess is not "faithless." Pasiphaë means "she who shines for all," which explains the sixth line of the last stanza. In other words, the Goddess' habit of deceiving her lovers is not an indication of her faithlessness, for she is impartial like the invariable light of the moon.

And since "this must be a night without a moon," the poet implores the sun not to move, for a moonless night represents the dark aspect of the Goddess; on this night she will betray and murder her lover--her poet. The word "must" means that the poet must inevitably suffer a symbolic death, for man is a demi-god, and the Goddess only can satisfy him by alternate murder.

The poet's apprehensions are clearly in this poem; the theme of doom and symbolic death is expressed by the dying sun, the symbol of the Spirit of the Year; moreover, the poet's own relationship to the Muse, to the Cretan Moon-goddess, Pasiphaë, is expressed by the mythological language: he accepts her betrayal, and he does not ask for pity; he only asks the sun to shine a little longer. The poet accepts his symbolic death as an inevitability. The theme of symbolic death is common to, for example, "The Castle" and "Lament for Pasiphaë"; however, the latter poem expresses that theme by the ancient language of myth, that is to say, in the context of the love theme--the life, death, and resurrection of the Spirit of the Year, the Goddess' lover. Most of Graves' poems from here on are "personal variations" of the one poetic Theme.

The poet's own experience of the Muse is the theme of "Darien," and though the poem uses the language of myth, it is unlike "Juan" because the poet is directly involved in the action of the poem:

It is a poet's privilege and fate
To fall enamoured of the one Muse
Who variously haunts this island earth.

She was your mother, Darien,
And presaged by the darting halcyon bird
Would run green-sleeved along her ridges,
Treading the asphodels and heather-trees
With white feet bare.

Often at moonrise I had watched her go,
 And a cold shudder shook me
 Averted her set face, her business
 Not yet with me, long-striding,
 She would ascend the peak and pass from sight.
 But once at full moon, by the sea's verge,
 I came upon her without warning.

Unrayed she stood, with long hair streaming,
 A cockle-shell cupped in her warm hands,
 Her axe propped idly on a stone.

No awe possessed me, only a great grief;
 Wanly she smiled, but would not lift her eyes
 (As a young girl will greet the stranger).
 I stood upright, a head taller than she.
 'See who has come,' said I.

She answered: 'If I lift my eyes to yours
 And our eyes marry, man, what then?
 Will they engender my son Darien?
 Swifter than wind, with straight and nut-brown hair,
 Tall, slender-shanked, grey-eyed, untameable;
 Never was born, nor ever will be born
 A child to equal my son Darien,
 Guardian of the hid treasures of your world'

I knew then by the trembling of her hands
 For whom that flawless blade would sweep:
 My own oracular head, swung by its hair.

'Mistress,' I cried, 'the times are evil
 And you have charged me with their remedy.
 O, where my head is now, let nothing be
 But a clay counterfeit with nacre blink:
 Only look up, so Darien may be born!

'He is the northern star, the spell of knowledge,
 Pride of all hunters and all fishermen,
 Your deathless fawn, an eaglet of your eyrie,
 The topmost branch of your unfellable tree,
 A tear streaking the summer night,
 The new green of my hope.'

Lifting her eyes,
 She held mine for a lost eternity.
 'Sweetheart,' said I, 'strike now, for Darien's sake!' (pp. 216-217)

Darien's mother is the Cretan Moon-goddess or Mountain-Goddess or White Goddess or Muse. She appears in her summer aspect (nubile woman). The

"heather-trees" signify the season of summer; but the "asphodels" suggest rocky, barren ground and Elysium, a place where the king's soul awaits rebirth. In other words, the Muse is divine, for in summer as a Love-goddess (Aphrodite) she promises the king resurrection-through-death. Asphodel is a tough-stemmed plant and difficult to walk on with bare feet; indeed, the Goddess skims over the mountain ridges and plants as her prophetic bird, the "halcyon" or kingfisher, skims over a calm sea. Pliny claims that the halcyon is rarely seen except at the winter and summer solstices. The halcyon is credited also with allaying storms, and therefore is associated with a calm sea. The halcyon in the poem, then, is a symbol of the Goddess of the summer solstice. The bird is also sacred to Aphrodite, another title of the Goddess of Love and Death; its colors are white and blue. The halcyon represents the White Goddess in her orgiastic or midsummer aspect. She is a Goddess of Love and Death in this stanza.

The "Cretan axe" of the third stanza identifies the Muse as the Cretan Moon-goddess. Her axe is double-bladed, consisting of two moon-like blades, one decrescent, one crescent. The decrescent curve or blade represents a waning moon and the crescent curve a waxing moon. In other words, the Goddess' Cretan axe represents her power of destruction and creation, sorrow and joy, lack and plenty, decay and growth. The poet knows that eventually her axe must decapitate him.

The word "unrayed" of the fourth stanza suggests that the Goddess is now incarnate in the poet's personal Muse, a royal woman. And the poet's "grief" in the fifth stanza confirms that the personal Muse, the "unrayed" woman, is his executioner: she smiles "wanly," recalling the waning moon, the decrescent curve of the Cretan axe, sacred to the Cretan Moon-goddess.

The rest of the poem develops the theme of the dying God of the Waxing Year, the poet. Darien represents the poet's renewed self. In the myth of Osiris, for example, Osiris is the Star-son and the Child Horus stands for his renewed self. Similarly, Darien represents the Divine Child, the poet's renewed self. However, Darien symbolizes more than the Divine Child of the New Year. As the "northern star" he represents hope and spiritual illumination, shining from the sunless quarter of the sky. His "nut-brown" hair recalls the hazeltree of the Beth-Luis-Nion alphabet. Since the fish that ate the hazel nuts concentrated all knowledge into themselves, Darien, like the fish, is the pride of "all fishermen," for he represents wisdom; he is the "spell" of all knowledge. In the sixth stanza, then, the woman asks the poet if the marriage of their eyes will "engender" Darien--wisdom. Moreover, if she inspires the poet, the woman asks, is he worthy and able to create poems--concentrated wisdom? This explains why Darien is "swifter than wind," meaning that the swiftness of poetic thought--concentrated wisdom--is swifter than wind. In other words, Darien represents the spirit of poetry. He is, of course, "untameable" because his is a son of Our Lady of the Wild Things.

In the myth of Niamh of the Golden Hair, Oisín sees his weird or rival as a hornless fawn. Soon, however, the fawn becomes himself. Oisín chases Niamh, who holds a golden apple in her hand. Both are skimming over a calm sea. Similarly, the "deathless fawn" in the poem is the poet's other self, who, however, stands for his renewed self. And since the soul of the sacred king escapes to Elysium in the form of an eagle, Darien is appropriately an "eaglet."

The meaning of the stanza is clear. The "deathless fawn" is the poet himself reborn as the Divine Child, Darien. The "deathless fawn" or

Darien is the pride of "all hunters" because he represents immortality-through-wisdom. The "unfelling tree" probably is the myrtle, sacred to Aphrodite. Since the myrtle is an evergreen, it represents the resurrection of the sacred king or simply his immortality. "Tear" is likely a synonym for dew. During the alder month the Divine Child sails in his coracle over the floods of spring; and in the summer he lies shining on the grass. The poet is willing to die so that he may be reborn as a child of the Great Goddess. The poet is willing to die a symbolic death so that his power of creating poems may be renewed. And his death may "engender" Darien, who represents spiritual illumination, poetic wisdom--the spirit of poetry--and the renewed poet, born as a son to the Goddess once more. Indeed, the poet already has a vision of his "oracular head," of his own death. The poem clearly presents a "personal variation" of the one poetic Theme: as a lover of the orgiastic Goddess of midsummer the poet must die so that he can be reborn as her son or Divine Child.

In "Darien" the poet dies for the "evil" times, for the Goddess has charged him with their remedy. However, the poem does not develop how the times are evil, but "The Destroyer" answers that question historically:

Swordsman of the narrow lips,
Narrow hips and murderous mind
Fenced with chariots and ships,
By your joculars hailed
The mailed wonder of manking,
Far to westward you have sailed.

You it was dared seize the throne
Of a blown and amorous prince
Destined to the Moon alone,
A lame, golden-heeled decoy,
Joy of hens that gape and wince
Inarticulately coy.

You who, capped with lunar gold
 Like an old and savage dunce,
 Let the central hearth go cold,
 Grinned, and left us here your sword
 Warden of sick fields that once
 Sprouted of their own accord.

Gusts of laughter the Moon stir
 That her Bassarids now bed
 With the unnoble usurer,
 While an ignorant pale priest
 Rides the beast with a man's head
 To her long-omitted feast.²²

In The White Goddess Graves introduces the poem with the following comment:

". . . we owe her a satire on the memory of the man who first tilted European civilization off balance, by enthroning the restless and arbitrary male will under the name of Zeus and dethroning the female sense of orderliness, Themis. The Greeks knew him as Pterseus the Destroyer, the Gorgon-slaying warrior-prince from Asia, remote ancestor of the destroyers Alexander, Pompey and Napoleon" (p. 540). The poem records how the "Swordsman" replaced the Goddess' lover, the "amorous prince." The Destroyer seized the throne from the "prince" or lover, whose destiny was to live and die for the "Moon" or Moon-goddess. He was ritually lamed at his coronation, and deceived by the "hens," the Goddess' priestesses. The Destroyer abandoned the "central hearth" or center of the home, of motherhood, trampling the fields with his armies and destroying them beyond repair. Even the "Bassarids" now sleep with Pterseus. Once the Goddess rode her Lion or poet, that is, inspired him to write poems, but now an "ignorant" priest rides only a "beast" with a "man's head." In the Destroyer's world there is no divine or inspired wisdom, and the priest rides to the Goddess'

²²The White Goddess, pp. 540-541.

"feast": she has turned cannibal. The "evil" of the times in "Darien," then, can be understood in the sense that the "arbitrary male will," the warrior, has usurped matriarchal rule.

Priests and warriors belong to patriarchal civilization. And the present phase of civilization may yet see the Day of Judgment. In "Return of the Goddess" Graves fears the worst:

Under your Milky Way
And slow-revolving Bear,
Frogs from the alder-thicket pray
In terror of the judgement day,
Loud with repentance there.

The log they crowned as king
Grew sodden, lurched and sank.
Dark waters bubble from the spring,
An owl floats by on silent wing,
They invoke you from each bank.

At dawn you shall appear,
A gaunt, red-wattled crane,
She whom they know too well for fear,
Lunging your beak down like a spear
To fetch them home again.²³

In The White Goddess Graves introduces the poem with a short comment: "The longer her hour is postponed, and therefore the more exhausted by man's irreligious improvidence the natural resources of the soil and sea become, the less merciful will her five-fold mask be, and the narrower the scope of action that she grants to whichever demi-god she chooses to take as her temporary consort in godhead. Let us placate her in advance by assuming the cannibalistic worst" (p. 540). Surely the poem needs no further gloss except perhaps to point out that the Goddess appears in the poem as a

²³Ibid., p. 540.

"crane," cannibalistically feeding on the "frogs" or "they"--all those who have usurped her power and sovereignty. Eater by her, the "they" return to the Universal Mother, their mother, bride, and layer-out. Civilization will again be matriarchal, honoring the Goddess with all her old titles. Mankind will have come "home."

There are other poems that deal with the poet and his Muse: "The Straw," "Dialogue on the Headland," "The Window Sill," and "The Second-Fated," to name a few. The above poems and others are also "personal variations" on the one poetic Theme. Though the Goddess smiles, her ultimate function is to betray her lovers. In the poems of this period she appears as Hecate, executioner, and maneater. However, implicit in the poems discussed is the poet's continuing love for the Muse and his sense of her glory and power of inspiration, which lead him to reject the patriarchal world of wars, reason, and priests. The poem "Cry Faugh!" illustrates this nicely:

Caria and Philistia considered
Only pre-marital adventures wise;
The bourgeois French argue contrariwise.

Socrates and Plato burked the issue
(Namely, how man-and-woman love should be)
With homosexual ideology.

Apocalyptic Israelites, foretelling
The Imminent End, called only for a chaste
Sodality: all dead below the waist.

Curious, various, amoral, moral--
Tell me, what elegant square or lumpish hamlet
Lives free from nymphological disquiet?

'Yet males and females of the lower species
Contrive to eliminate the sexual problem,'
Scientists ponder: 'Why not learn from them?'

Cry faugh! on science, ethics, metaphysics,
 On antonyms of sacred and profane--
 Come walk with me, love, in a golden rain

Past toppling colonnades of glory,
 The moon alive on each uptiled face:
 Proud remnants of a visionary race. (p. 221)

And in The White Goddess Graves explains that "Socrates, in turning his back on poetic myths, was really turning his back on the Moon-goddess who inspired them and who demanded that man should pay woman spiritual and sexual homage: what is called Platonic love, the philosopher's escape from the power of the Goddess into intellectual homosexuality, was really Socratic love" (p. viii). The Muse demands whole love and absolute devotion. The poet rejects other disciplines because they do not pay "spiritual" homage to the Goddess.

Though the poems of the next and last period, the 1960's, continue to record the theme of the poet's symbolic death--the cruel aspect of the Goddess--they also record her benign aspect. Moreover, the White Goddess has a sister, the Black Goddess, who represents a miraculous certitude in love, which the White Goddess could never promise to her poet. The Black Goddess, in contrast to her white sister, does not disclose on

Each breast a rose,
 A white and cankered rose. (p. 231)

CHAPTER III

THE BENIGN GODDESS AND THE BLACK GODDESS

In the essay "Intimations of the Black Goddess" Graves explains that "only during the past three years have I ventured to dramatize, truthfully and factually, the vicissitudes of a poet's dealings with the White Goddess, the Muse, the perpetual Other Woman."¹ Since "Intimations" was written in 1963, the poems written after 1960 dramatize the "vicissitudes" of poetic love. The poems that begin the 1960's are "Lyceia," "The Sharp Ridge," "Troughs of Sea," "The Cure," and "Hag-Ridden." These poems and others dramatize the dark aspect of the poet-Muse relationship. "The Falcon Woman," for example, dwells on the Goddess' habit of evading promises and on the poet's own worthlessness:

It is hard to be a man
Whose word is his bond
In love with such a woman,

When he builds on a promise
She lightly let fall
In carelessness of spirit.

The more sternly he asks her
To stand by that promise
The faster she flies.

But is it less hard
To be born such a woman
With wings like a falcon
And in carelessness of spirit
To love such a man? (p. 263)

Though the poems of the 1960's that reflect her dark side are no less interesting and rewarding than those of the 1940's and 1950's, I want to dis-

¹Mammon, p. 151.

cuss those poems that explicitly deal with the benign aspect of the poet-Muse relationship. The Goddess' cruelty is recorded in the previous chapter; her kindness is not. Though some of the poems discussed in the second chapter express the Goddess' creative power, they usually do so under the threat of personal doom, death, and universal catastrophe. However, the poems of the 1960's that do express the Goddess' kindness exclude her dark aspect. In the poem "The Three-Faced," for example, the poet even denies that the Goddess is "two-faced" or deceitful:

Who calls her two-faced? Faces, she has three:
The first inscrutable, for the outer world;
The second shrouded in self-contemplation;
The third, her face of love,
Once for an endless moment turned on me. (p. 346)

Though the White Goddess' ultimate function is to betray her lovers, she sometimes shows them her face of love, her hand uplifted in blessing.

"Under the Olives" begins the series and simply states that love struck despite reason:

We never would have loved had love not struck
Swifter than reason, and despite reason:
Under the olives, our hands interlocked,
We both fell silent:
Each listened for the other's answering
Sigh of unreasonableness--
Innocent, gentle, bold, enduring, proud. (p. 259)

That love struck "despite reason" suggests the poet's unreasonable faith in the Goddess; indeed, "innocent" is an unreasonable description of the White Goddess who is guilty of murder. However, it is "despite reason" that love struck, despite the Goddess' cruelty and seemingly unreasonable actions. Indeed, in the poem "Possessed" the poet claimed that "She knows

what she must do, not why": the Goddess herself cannot give a rational explanation of her behavior.

Similarly, in "The Visitation" the poet knows that he is her chosen lover, but he does not know why:

Drowsing in my chair of disbelief
I watch the door as it slowly opens--
A trick of the night wind?

Your slender body seems a shaft of moonlight
Against the door as it gently closes.
Do you cast no shadow?

Your whisper is too soft for credence,
Your tread like blossom drifting from a bough,
Your touch even softer.

You wear that sorrowful and tender mask
Which on high mountain tops in heather-flow
entrances lonely shepherds;

And though a single word scatters all doubts
I quake for wonder at your choice of me:
Why, why and why? (p. 260)

The Muse in the poem is not a woman. She is the White Goddess, who once more scatters the poet's doubt. The metaphors and similes in the poem indicate the spiritual presence of the Goddess: she casts no shadow. The "heather-flow" recalls the heather of the tree-alphabet; and "shepherds" is a synonym for poets or sacred kings, the Goddess' lovers. The Love Goddess of the summer solstice, then, entrances the poet; she chooses him to be her lover. Though her word restores his belief in her, the poet does not know why she chooses him to be her lover.

"Between Moon and Moon" conveys the poet's satisfaction with the Goddess of the New Moon:

In the last sad watches of night
 Hardly a sliver of light will remain
 To edge the guilty shadow of a waned moon
 That dawn must soon devour.

Thereafter, another
 Crescent queen shall arise with power--
 So wise a beauty never yet seen, say I:
 A true creature of moon, though not the same
 In nature, name or feature--
 Her innocent eye rebuking inconstancy
 As if Time itself should die and disappear.

So was it ever. She is here again, I sigh. (p. 310)

The "Crescent queen" is the White Goddess in her maiden aspect; and in that aspect she is, of course, not yet guilty of murder. (It is as nubile woman that she kills her lovers.) The new queen represents the continuous love between poet and Muse. "Time," of course, is the enemy of constancy because it brings the waning moon--the death of the poet. The "Crescent queen" satisfies the poet, for she is the benign Goddess who seems to rebuke "Time" itself.

"Fire Walker" dwells on the passionate aspect of the Goddess:

To be near her is to be near the furnace.
 Fortunate boy who could slip idly through,
 Basket in hand, culling the red-gold blossom,
 Then wander on, untaught that flowers were flame,
 With no least smell of scorching on his clothes!
 I, at a greater distance, charred to coal,
 Earn her reproach for my temerity. (p. 334)

The Goddess' passion is described as a furnace and as a flame. The "boy" is not scorched because he is "untaught" about passion. But the poet is burned to coal for his rashness, for his audacity to come close to the passionate Goddess. The poet is not "untaught" about passion. And that he is "charred" indicates that he was very close to the Goddess of Love. Her love is fierce, indeed.

In "A Measure of Casualness" the Goddess' presence is almost overwhelming:

Too fierce the candlelight; your gentle voice
 Roars as in dream; my shoulder-nooks flower;
 A scent of honeysuckle invades the house,
 And my fingertips are so love-enhanced
 That sailcloth feels like satin to them.
 Teach me a measure of casualness
 Though you stalk into my room like Venus naked. (p. 369)

"Seldom Yet Now" recalls the Lady of the Wild Things:

Seldom yet now: the quality
 Of this fierce love between us--
 Seldom the encounter,
 The presence always,
 Free of oath or promise.

 And if we were not so
 But birds of similar plumage caged
 In the peace of every day,
 Would we still conjure wildfire up
 From common earth, as now? (p. 275)

The love between poet and Muse is wild and "Free of oath or promise." Domestic love, "the peace of every day," between poet and Vesta, man and wife, does not have the power to conjure a "wild fire," does not have the magic of the poet-Muse relationship. The poem is evidence of the continuing love between poet and Goddess.

The long poem "Turn of the Moon" identifies the Moon's power to bring rain with woman's love. Here are the first and last stanzas:

Never forget who brings the rain
 In swarthy goatskin bags from a far sea;
 It is the Moon as she turns, repairing
 Damages of long drought and sunstroke.

But if one night she brings us, as she turns,
 Soft, steady, even, copious rain
 That harms no leaf nor flower, but gently falls
 Hour after hour, sinking to the tap roots,
 And the sodden earth exhales at dawn
 A long sigh scented with pure gratitude,
 Such rain--the first rain of our lives, it seems,
 Neither foretold, cajoled, nor counted on--
 Is woman giving as she loves. (pp. 271-272)

The Moon or Moon-goddess brings rain in "goatskin bags," that is to say, her priestesses perform magic rain-making ceremonies, watering the soil with their goatskin bags. The goat is sacred to the Goddess. The sacred king, dressed in goatskins, mated with the Goddess, was murdered and resurrected. (The Goat-Dionysus and Pan cults, for example, belong to this fertility rite.) The Moon, then, appropriately uses goatskin bags to bring the rain. In this first stanza she appears as a Goddess of Fertility.

The important word in the last stanza is "copious." The Moon's rain and woman's love is ample; however, her love is unpredictable like the rain. The poet identifies the Moon, the visible symbol of divine woman, with woman's love. Also, the Moon's power to bring rain is the Moon-goddess giving as she loves. In other words, divine woman's and woman's love is "copious"; their love is sufficient. And the Moon-goddess' power of fertility--to bring rain--is "copious" because it sustains life and repairs "drought" and "sunstroke." Though the Moon appears in her benign aspect, her rain and love cannot be predicted or counted on.

There are many other poems that express the kind Goddess. A short list would include "Apple Island," "The Laugh," "Recognition," "The Meeting," "The Ambrosia of Dionysus and Semele," and "In Time." But the Muse

is the White Goddess, who ultimately breaks her promises and chooses another lover:

On a clear day how thin the horizon
Drawn between sea and sky,
Between sea-love and sky-love;
And after sunset how debatable
Even for an honest eye.

'Do as you will tonight,'
Said she, and so he did
By moonlight, candlelight,
Candlelight and moonlight,
While pillowed clouds the horizon hid.

Knowing-not-knowing that such deeds must end
In a curse which lovers long past weeping for
Had heaped upon him: she would be gone one night
With his familiar friend,
Granting him leave her beauty to explore
By moonlight, candlelight,
Candlelight and moonlight. (p. 300)

Surely the above poem, "Horizon," needs little comment. The White Goddess, though she shows her poet kindness and love, eventually asserts her dark side; she chooses evil (the poet's rival), betrays her faithful lover, and finally murders him.

In the essay "Intimations of the Black Goddess" Graves lists three stages of poetry: "Poetry, it may be said passes through three distinct stages: first, the poet's introduction, by Vesta, to love in its old-fashioned forms of affection and companionship; next, his experience of death and recreation at the White Goddess's hand; and lastly a certitude in love, given him by the Black Goddess, his more-than-Muse."² Graves

²Mammon, p. 164.

continues his comments on the three stages of poetry, describing the Black Goddess who promises a final reality of love:

The Black Goddess is so far hardly more than a word of hope whispered among the few who have served their apprenticeship to the White Goddess. She promises a new pacific bond between men and women, corresponding to a final reality of love, in which the patriarchal marriage bond will fade away. Unlike Vesta, the Black Goddess has experienced good and evil, love and hate, truth and falsehood in the person of her sister; but chooses what is good: rejecting serpent-love and corpse flesh. Faithful as Vesta, gay and adventurous as the White Goddess, she will lead man back to that sure instinct of love which he long ago forfeited by intellectual pride.³

The Black Goddess, then, chooses only what is good; she is not like her sister, the White Goddess, who chooses good and evil as winter succeeds summer. The poems that deal with the poet's experiences of the Black Goddess reflect the theme of transcendence. Love is no longer unpredictable as in "Turn of the Moon." The poet need not die a symbolic death, and the theme of betrayal is nonexistent.

The poem "The Black Goddess" reflects the poet's new-found joy in her land:

Silence, words into foolishness fading,
Silence prolonged, of thought so secret
We hush the sheep-bells and the loud cicada.

And your black agate eyes, wide open, mirror
The released firebird beating his way
Down a whirled avenue of blues and yellows.

Should I not weep? Profuse the berries of love,
The speckled fish, the filberts and white ivy
Which you, with a half-smile, bestow
On your delectable broad land of promise
For me, who never before went gay in plumes. (p. 378)

³Ibid., p. 164.

In the Goddess' presence words are foolish; and the unspoken thought between poet and Goddess remains a secret. The poet's inner communion with the Goddess renders words superfluous. The poet's release from the vicissitudes of love is represented by the "firebird," a bright orange and red bird. The "firebird" symbolizes the new soul of the poet, now released from the death and resurrection cycle of the White Goddess' lovers. Indeed, the Black Goddess' land is wholly good: the berries of love recall the vine, the tree of joy in the Beth-Luis-Nion alphabet; the "speckled fish" swim in the pool of wisdom; the "filberts" or hazelnuts recall the hazel, the tree of wisdom; and in the tree-calendar the ivy is the tree of resurrection. In other words, the poet is released from the seasonal cycle and reborn to fly in the Black Goddess' land of promise, love, joy, and wisdom. The Black Goddess' smile bestows joy on the released poet, who "never before went gay on plumes."

In "Intimations of the Black Goddess" Graves writes that "at Hierapolis, Jerusalem, and Rome she [the White Goddess] acknowledged a mysterious sister, the Goddess of Wisdom, whose temple was small and unthronged. Call her the Black Goddess: Provençal and Sicilian Black Virgins are so named because they derive from an ancient tradition of Wisdom as Blackness. This Black Goddess, who represents a miraculous certitude in love, ordained that the poet who seeks her must pass uncomplaining through all the passionate ordeals to which the White Goddess may subject him."⁴ "Speckled fish" and "filberts," then, are natural emblems in the land of the Black Goddess who is also the Goddess of Wisdom.

⁴Mammon, p. 162.

In the poem "The Black Goddess" Wisdom's land is wholly good; and in "Uncalendared Love" she clearly rejects "serpent-love," the love of the poet's evil rival:

The first name cut on a rock, a King's,
Marked the beginning of time's annals;
And each new year would recapitulate
The unkind sloughings and renewals
Of the death-serpent's chequered coat.

But you with me together, together, together,
Survive ordeals never before endured:
We snatch the quill out of Enoch's hand
To obliterate our names from his black scroll--
Twin absentees of time.

Ours is uncalendared love, whole life,
As long or brief as befalls. Alone, together,
Recalling little, prophesying less,
We watch the serpent, crushed by your bare heel,
Rainbow his scales in a deathward agony. (p. 295)

The first stanza summarizes the yearly renewal or triumph of the God of the Waning Year. The second stanza conveys the poet's survival of death: he and the Black Goddess erase their names from Enoch's list of the damned on the Last Judgment. Poet and Goddess are outside God's or Enoch's time and outside "time's annals." They have already survived the Last Judgment.

The final stanza expresses the theme of transcendence. Their love is "uncalendared": the Goddess rejects the God of the Waning Year, the "serpent." Indeed, the "serpent" dies, presumably never to arise again. By implication, the Black Goddess chooses only the good, the God of the Waxing Year, the poet.

In "The Hearth" the Black Goddess appears as Mother Night, the Goddess mentioned in the Orphic Fragments:

Here it begins: the worm of love breeding
Among red embers of a hearth-fire

Turns to a chick, is slowly fledged,
And will hop from lap to lap in a ring
Of eager children basking at the blaze.

But the luckless man who never sat there
Nor borrowed live coals from the sacred source
To warm a hearth of his own making,
Nor bedded lay under pearl-grey wings
In dutiful content,

How shall he watch at the stroke of midnight
Dove become phoenix, plumed with green and gold?
Or be caught up by jewelled talons
And haled away to a fastness of the hills
Where an unveiled woman, black as Mother Night,
Teaches him a new degree of love
And the tongues and songs of birds? (p. 374)

The "worm" is born from the ashes of the Egyptian Phoenix. After four years the worm grows to a Phoenix chick, and finally it becomes a Phoenix. The Phoenix is an eagle representing the Sun-god who is reborn each year. Therefore, the Phoenix is a symbol of spiritual rebirth.

In the Orphic religion Night has a dove's head. The "pearl-grey wings" of the second stanza seem to refer to the dove (Night) or turtle-dove. The "luckless man," then, is a man who has never borrowed coals from the fire that consumed the Phoenix, the fire of spiritual rebirth; and the man never bedded under the wings of the turtle-dove or Night, the Goddess of Wisdom. The turtle-dove is a fitting symbol to represent the Black Goddess, for the turtle-dove mates for life and is faithful to its mate. (In the Talmud David also sleeps under the wings of the Shekinah, that is, Wisdom. In Orphic religion Night appears as a triad of Wisdom or Blackness, Order, and Justice.)

The last stanza relates what the "luckless man" does not see if he never borrowed from the sacred source and never slept under Wisdom's wings. He will not see how dove becomes phoenix: how Wisdom brings

spiritual rebirth. He will not see how the Sun-god or eagle ("jewelled talons") flies him to a woman black as Night: how the spiritual rebirth-through-Wisdom brings illumination ("the unveiled woman"), faithful love (the "new degree of love"), and the understanding of the songs of birds, of Nature, of the normally unintelligible.

In another poem, "That Other World," the "Virginal St. Sophia, that is, Wisdom--mothers the creative Love-god":⁵

Fatedly alone with you once more
As before Time first creaked:
Sole woman and sole man.

Others admire us as we walk this world:
We show them kindness and mercy,
So be it none grow jealous
Of the truth that echoes between us two,
Or of that other world, in the world's cradle,
Child of your love for me. (p. 375)

As in "Uncalendared Love," the poet and Goddess are alone before time. The "child" is not the Divine Child or the poet's rival; he is the creative love-child, the child of Wisdom's love for the poet. And the poem "Gift of Sight" is representative of the sense of illumination that accompanies Wisdom's presence:

I had long known the diverse tastes of the wood,
Each leaf, each bark, rank earth from every hollow;
Knew the smells of bird's breath and of bat's wing;
Yet sight I lacked: until you stole upon me,
Touching my eyelids with light finger-tips.
The trees blazed out, their colours whirled together,
Nor ever before had I been aware of sky. (p. 408)

The poem "Gold and Malachite" records the poet's freedom from the "incubus of despair," the demon of nightmare:

⁵ Mammon, p. 162.

After the hour of illumination, when the tottering mind
 Has been by force delivered from its incubus of despair,
 When all the painted, papier mâché, Mexican faces
 Of demons grinning at you from hell's vaulted roof
 Fade and become angelic monitors of wisdom--
 Slowly the brisk intelligence wakes, to mutter questions
 Of when, where, how; and which should be the first step forward. . . .

Now is the crucial moment you were forewarned against.
 Stop your ears with your fingers, guard unequivocal silence
 Lest you discuss wisdom in the language of unwisdom;
 Roam instead through the heaped treasury of your heart:
 You will find her, from whom you have been so long estranged,
 Chin to knees, brooding apart on gold and malachite.
 But beware again: even a shy embrace would be too explicit--
 Let her learn by your gait alone that you are free at last. (p. 417)

The transformation of the "demons" into "angelic monitors of wisdom" is an indication of the Black Goddess' presence. She does not send the demons, but messengers of wisdom. The poem typically does not state what was revealed during the hour of illumination. As in the first stanza of "The Black Goddess," words are out of place; and the reason for silence is clear: "Lest you discuss wisdom in the language of unwisdom." Even an embrace is too bold a gesture to convey the poet's illumination and freedom from despair. Indeed, the "intelligence" with all its questions must be put aside; instead, the poet advises himself that the Black Goddess dwells within his own heart, and there he sees her brooding on gold and malachite, the "treasury" of his own heart. The poem defines an attitude toward the Black Goddess: the illumination inspired by her presence must remain secret; and the freedom from despair, from the vicissitudes of the White Goddess' love, is conveyed without words--in silence. Only from the poet's "gait" does Wisdom learn of his freedom.

Freedom from a "familiar prison" is again the theme of the next poem, "Deliverance":

Lying disembodied under the trees
 (Their slender trunks converged above us
 Like rays of a five-fold star) we heard
 A sudden whinnying from the dark hill.

Our implacable demon, foaled by love,
 Never knew rein or saddle; though he drank
 From a stream winding by, his blue pastures
 Ranged far out beyond the stellar mill.

He had seared us two so close together
 That death itself might not disjoin us;
 It was impossible you could love me less,
 It was impossible I could love you more.

We were no calculating lovers
 But gasped in awe at our deliverance
 From a too familiar prison,
 And vainly puzzled how it was that now
 We should never need to build another,
 As each, time after time, had done before. (p. 434)

Because the poet and woman are disembodied, the "demon" was created by their spiritual love. And though the lovers lie under trees that come together like a five-fold star, signifying the cycle of death and rebirth, the "demon feeds far beyond the "stellar mill." The "mill" has the same poetic meaning as "five-fold star"; however, the foal-demon grazes beyond the mill, meaning that the "demon" transcends or is beyond the annual vegetation cycle. Indeed, the "demon" joined the "disembodied" lovers so close that even death cannot disjoin them. And their deliverance from the cycle and even from death is not a calculated act; their absolute love has created the free "demon," the symbol of their freedom and transcendence. And now that they are free there is no need to return to prison, to the endless seasonal cycle, for the woman cannot love less and the poet cannot love more: their love is perfect and absolute. Though Graves often writes that absolute love between woman and man is an impossibility, this is no longer true. In the Foreward to the Collected Poems 1966 he

writes: "My main theme was always the practical impossibility, transcended only by a belief in miracle, of absolute love continuing between man and woman" (p. viii). The love between poet and Wisdom in "Deliverance" is a miracle; their deliverance from prison is a miraculous event.

The poem "Conjunction" also contains the theme of absolute love between poet and Goddess:

What happens afterwards, none need enquire:
They are poised there in conjunction, beyond time,
At an oak-tree top level with Paradise.
Its leafy tester unshaken where they stand
Palm to palm, mouth to mouth, beyond desire,
Perpetuating lark song, perfume, colour,
And the tremulous gasp of watchful winds,

Past all unbelief, we know them held
By peace and light and irrefragable love--
Twin paragons, our final selves, resistant
To the dull pull of earth dappled with shade:
Myself the forester, never known to abandon
His vigilant coursing of the greenwood's floor.
And you, dryad of dryads, never before
Yielding her whole heart to the enemy, man. (p. 435)

The two "final selves," the poet and the dryad, are joined beyond time because they are on top of the "oak-tree," the tree on which the White Goddess' lovers died at the summer solstice. The "oak-tree" top is level with "Paradise," meaning that the final selves are above or beyond the earth's annual drama of death and rebirth. Indeed, the two are beyond "desire." And the two selves are held near Paradise by "peace," "light," and incontrovertible love. The poet abandons his earthly existence, and the Goddess yields her heart to him for the first time.

Dryad refers to the Muse as a wood-fairy, that is to say, the inspiration induced by listening to the wind, the messenger of the Muse, who blows through the sacred oak grove. The "dryad of dryads," then,

means more-than-Muse: the Goddess of Wisdom. The poet's self and Wisdom's self are resistant to the "dull pull of earth." In other words, the poet and Goddess are joined in absolute love, for she yields her "whole heart" to the poet. The miracle of absolute love continuing between man and woman ends the poem. Since the Black Goddess chooses only what is good, the "practical impossibility," the miracle of absolute love, she represents a "miraculous certitude in love," a final reality of love, "perpetuating lark song, perfume, colour,/ And the tremulous gasp of watchful winds," the messengers of her love and wisdom.

The poem "Nothing Now Astonishes" reflects the rare moment of peace in love:

A month of vigilance draws to its close
With silence of snow and the Northern lights
In longed-for wordlessness.

This rainbow spanning our two worlds
Becomes more than a bridge between them;
They fade into geography.

Variegated with the seven colours
We twist them into skeins for hide and seek
In a lovers' labyrinth.

Can I be astonished at male trembling
Of sea-horizons as you lean towards them?
Nothing now astonishes.

You change, from a running drop of pure gold
On a silver salver, to the white doe
In nut-groves harbouring.

Let me be changed now to an eight-petalled
Scarlet anemone that will never strain
for the circling butterfly.

Rest, my loud heart. Your too exultant flight
Had raised the wing-beat to a roar
Drowning seraphic whispers. (p. 436)

Like most of the poems reflecting the poet's experiences of Wisdom, silence is the rule. Their "two worlds" fade into geography: they become one. And the trembling of the male "sea-horizon" no longer astonishes the poet. The Goddess changes from a drop of gold to a white doe, from illumination to immortality, for the white doe lodges under the apple tree, the tree of immortality. However, the white hind harbours in "nut-groves," meaning she represents immortality-through-wisdom. The poet wishes to be a scarlet anemone; and the white doe will eat him; and surely he will rest in Paradise and not strain after the "circling butterfly," the soul that always completes the endless circuit of death and rebirth. In the final stanza the poet introduces a note of caution: his wish to be an anemone was too loud and drowned her angelic whispers.

In "The Tangled Thread" poet and Goddess transcend the world of the senses:

Desire, first, by a natural miracle
United bodies, united hearts, blazed beauty;
Transcended bodies, transcended heart.

Two souls, now unalterably one
In whole love always and forever,
Soar out of twilight, through upper air,
Let all their sensuous burden.

Is it kind, though, is it honest even,
To consort with none but spirits--
Leaving true-wedded hearts like ours
In enforced night-long separation
Each to its random bodily inclination,
The thread of miracle tangled, not snapped.⁶

The first stanza summarizes Graves' notion that the natural miracle of desire is the basis of love; and the spiritual love between poet and Muse is

⁶ Robert Graves, Love Respelt (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1966), p. 40.

also an unforeseeable miracle. The last line of the first stanza refers to the Black Goddess, who represents a miraculous certitude in love, for she does not alternate between good and evil, but transcends the unpredictable world of the White Goddess and her lovers.

In the second stanza the two souls are no longer earth-bound: they drop their "sensuous burden." But that the two hearts are left behind does not imply a loss of the natural miracle, only an entanglement of the thread of miracle caused by the tossing sleeping bodies of the lovers. "Whole love" or spiritual love does not negate natural love. Since the Black Goddess represents a miraculous certitude in love, her soul and the poet's naturally shed their "sensuous burden." The poem once more conveys the theme of transcendence--the freedom from the seasonal cycle, impermanence, and death. The poem attests to the miraculous spiritual love between poet and Wisdom.

A final poem on the theme of transcendence is "Fortunate Child." The "child" is the symbol of the Goddess' love for the poet:

For fear strangers might intrude upon us
You and I played at being strangers,
But lent our act such verisimilitude
That when at last, by hazard, we met alone
In a secret glen where the badger earths
We had drawn away from love: did not prepare
For melting of eyes into hearts of flowers.
For a sun-aureoled enhancement of hair,
For over-riding of death on an eagle's back--
Yet so it was: sky shuddered apart before us
Until, from a cleft of more than light, we both
Overheard the laugh of a fortunate child
Swung from those eagle talons in a gold cloth.⁷

⁷Ibid., p. 42.

Other poems that relate the poet's experiences of the Black Goddess are "The Cliff Edge," "The Unnamed Spell," "Bird of Paradise," "The Green Castle," "This Holy Month," and "What Will Be, Is." These poems and others also reflect the theme of transcendence. The first stanza of "Everywhere is Here," for example, declares that

By this exchange of eyes, this encirclement
 You of me, I of you, together we baffle
 Logic no doubt, but never understanding;
 And laugh instead of choking back the tears
 When we say goodbye. (p. 431)

And the poem "Dancing Flame" clearly states the theme of transcendence--the poet's resolve not to go back to the seasonal Theme:

Pass now in metaphor beyond birds,
 Their seasonal nesting and migration,
 Their airy frolics, their repetitive cries,
 Beyond all creatures but our own selves:
 Eternal geni of dancing flame
 Armed with the irreproachable secret
 Of love, which is: never to turn back.⁸

⁸Ibid., p. 44.

CONCLUSION

The transition from the poems dealing with the White Goddess to the poems concerned with the Black Goddess seems imperceptible. Though the two sets of poems are distinct thematically, they do not show a change of language as do the poems of the 1930's and 1940's. The language of myth used in the poems prior to the 1960's is continued in the poems that record the poet's experiences of the Black Goddess. Moreover, the poems dealing with the Black Goddess are not set off in Graves' collected edition, or labeled as a distinct group. Indeed, both sets of poems appear interspersed in the collected edition and in Love Respelt, Graves' latest book of poems. In other words, there seems to be no transition between the poet's worship of the White Goddess and Wisdom, his more-than-Muse.

How to account for the change? Graves maintains that the Black Goddess derives from an ancient tradition of Wisdom as Blackness. In Proverbs 9 Wisdom defines the beginning of wisdom as "fear of the Lord" and "knowledge of the holy"; however, the biblical chapter does not seem relevant to Graves' poetry, although the phrase "knowledge of the holy" taken out of context would be relevant: knowledge of the holy Goddess. But the post-Exilic religious tradition has obscured the original meaning of the chapter.

The secret oral tradition of the Hebrew Shekinah, the female emanation of God, recorded in the Zohar, is not much help, either. The Shekinah is the second person of the pre-Christian trinity. She is identified with Wisdom, the brightness of God's meditation. The third person of the trinity is Peace, that is, the "Peace that passeth understanding," which comes from worshipping Light (the Shekinah) and Life (God). Perhaps

the "Peace that passeth understanding" is similar to Graves' statement that the Black Goddess represents a miraculous certitude in love. But the biblical phrase does not account for the change in Graves' poetry.

Since other sources--Orphic, Greek, Persian, Christian--yield few clues, the poems seem the best source to account for the change, or rather point out that there is no way to account for change. The last two stanzas of "The Unnamed Spell" declare that the miraculous certitude represented by the Black Goddess is

Of no discoverable parentage,
Strangeling scion of varied stocks
Yet true to its own leaf,

Secret of secrets disclosed only
To who already share it,
Who themselves sometimes raised an arch--
Pillared with honour; its lintel love--
And passed silently through. (pp. 325-326)

In other words, the certitude in love, the Black Goddess, has no precedent: the poems dealing with the Goddess are original in the sense that they anticipate a "new pacific bond" between poet and Goddess, leading man back to that "sure instinct of love." And only those who already know her share the "secret of secrets"--the miraculous certitude in love. Apparently the poet has served his "apprenticeship" to the White Goddess, so that he can now seek out the Black Goddess, who is "hardly more than a word of hope." And, too, the differences between the two Goddesses--the "new pacific bond," the "final reality of love"--make a transitional period impossible, for the love between poet and Wisdom is absolute, miraculous, and permanent. The "apprenticeship" to the White Goddess, in contrast, was a period of discovery and transition.

The poems dealing with the Black Goddess perhaps are best understood in the light of the poems of the post-War years. The uncertainty, despair, and constant experience of spiritual death of the 1920's, continuing in the context of the single poetic Theme, finally are forgotten, giving way to a stable world in which the "practical impossibility" of continuous love between man and woman becomes possible. And certainly the poems dealing with the Black Goddess reflect the absolute love--the "belief in miracle"--between poet and Goddess. The Black Goddess seems the answer to many years of despair. And the bright vision of her Paradise is the answer to the many symbolic deaths that the poet suffered at the hands of her cruel sister:

Lead us with your song, tall Queen of earth!
 Twinned to the god, I follow comradely
 Through a first rainbow-limbo, webbed in white,
 Through chill Tyrrhenian grottoes, under water,
 Where dolphins wallow between marble rocks,
 Through sword-bright jungles, tangles of unease,
 Through halls of fear ceilinged with incubi,
 Through blazing treasure-chambers walled with garnet,
 Through domes pillared with naked Caryatids--
 Then mount at last on wings into pure air,
 Peering down with regal eye upon
 Five-fruited orchards of Elysium,
 In perfect knowledge of all knowledges.

And still she drowsily chants
 From her invisible bower of stars.
 Gentle her voice, her notes come linked together
 In intricate golden chains paid out
 Slowly across brocaded cramoisy,
 Or unfold like leaves from the jade-green shoot
 Of a rising bush whose blossoms are her tears. . . .
 O, whenever she pauses, my heart quails
 Until the sound renews.

Little slender lad, little secret god,
 Pledge her your faith in me,
 Who have ambrosia eaten and yet live. (pp. 323-324)

Though an evaluation of Graves' poetry is outside this introductory thesis, the following general comments are offered as a possible direction for future evaluations. Since Graves has followed consistently his own poetic principles, his poetry is not easily evaluated: he belongs to no movement, follows no poetic fashions, and he remains independent of contemporary innovations. But Graves' poetic world is not made up of private symbols and word associations. Most of his poems combine the communal poetic myths of ancient Europe with personal experiences. The poem "This Holy Month," for example, illustrates this combination:

The demon who throughout our late estrangement
 Followed with malice in my footsteps, often
 Making as if to stumble, so that I stumbled
 And gashed my head against a live rock;
 Who tore my palms on butcher's broom and thorn,
 Flung me at midnight into filthy ditches
 And multiplied the horrors of this house
 When back I limped again to a hard bed;
 Who simultaneously plagued you too
 With sleeplessness, dismay and darkness,
 Paralyzed your hands, denied you air--
 We both know well he was the same demon,
 Arch-enemy of rule and calculation,
 Who lives for our love, being created from it,
 Astonishes us with blossom, silvers the hills
 With more than moonlight, summons bees in swarms
 From the Lion's mouth to fill our hives with honey,
 Turns flesh into fire, and eyes into deep lakes;
 And so may do once more, this holy month. (p. 423)

The personal experience in the poem is explicit. The "demon" represents the consequences of the "estrangement." And by the end of the poem the demon's future actions reflect the return of love. The last six lines, however, convey the return of love in a particular way.

The word "blossom" identifies the season of the year. That the demon silvers the hills with more than moonlight reflects the illuminating

power of love. The Lion is a synonym for the White Goddess' lover. (In Greek myth the Lion-goddess Hera rides her lion.) But the Lion in the poem is dead, that is to say, the Lion is the Goddess' dead lover. The Goddess' new lover is the poet. The bees, as in the myths of Theseus and Samson, anticipate the Midsummer Bee-goddess, who stings her lover to death and emasculates him. But in the poem she appears as a Love-goddess of spring. This explains why "flesh" turns into "fire," meaning that love has returned as spring succeeds winter. That the eyes turn into deep lakes suggests the peaceful nature of love; it has not yet become the wild and turbulent love of midsummer.

In this poem, as in many others, Graves uses poetic myths or the symbols contained in the myths to enlarge the meaning of the poem and to express his personal experience. The central experience in "This Holy Month" is the loss and return of love; but the latter is expressed by mythic symbols. It is this firm interlocking of the mythic with the personal that forms the unity in Graves' poems. One can say, then, that the personal experience gives the mythic symbols their life, and the symbols extend the poet's personal experience. Since the two so often combine in Graves' poems, his poems can be evaluated on the basis of how well the two interlock. A good poem is one in which the mythic and personal are inseparable. A discussion of one should simultaneously be a discussion of the other.

Before such an evaluation is possible the reader must be well acquainted with poetic myths. And if he knows them, he must still judge the emotional content of the poems. Are the poems fictions or do they record the poet's actual experience--his emotions of fear, anger, grief,

and love? Graves himself maintains that his poems are not fictions but dramatizations of actual experience. According to him, poems intellectually conceived are false poems, that is, fictions. A poet should never write a poem unless he has a need to write. Indeed, Graves maintains that a poem is an attempt to resolve an emotional crisis as well as self-illumination. The emotional content, then, should be evaluated according to its genuineness. A poem may begin well enough, but if the poet loses the original impulse and then attempts to resolve the poem intellectually the result is an artificial poem. For example, Graves' poem "To be Called a Bear" seems contrived:

Bears gash forest trees
 To mark the bounds
 Of their own hunting grounds;
 They follow the wild bees
 Point by point home
 For love of honeycomb;
 They browse on blueberries.

Then should I stare
 If I am called a bear,
 And it is not the truth?
 Unkempt and surly with a sweet tooth
 I tilt my muzzle toward the starry hub
 Where Queen Callisto guards her cub;

But envy those that here
 All winter breathing slow
 Sleep warm under the snow,
 That yawn awake when the skies clear,
 And lank with longing grow
 No more than one brief month a year. (p. 177)

The initial emotion behind the poem is gone, leaving only an artificial identification of the poet with the bear. Though the poet envies the bear's brief longing, why he should identify himself with the bear is not clear. The poet's own experience is left out of the poem. The reader

wonders what the poet longs for. That he longs for Queen Callisto seems only a vague focus for his longing. There are other questions: do bears have a longing for clear skies? Do bears hibernate for only one month? It is the absence of any genuine longing in the poet, and consequently in the poem, that makes this poem unconvincing and an unnecessary intellectual effort.

Graves often criticizes other poets for attempting to resolve a poem by artifice. He considers this one of Donne's chief failings as a love-poet. He quotes Donne's magnificent (Graves' word)

I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I
Did, till we lov'd? were we not wean'd till then?
But suck'd on contrey pleasures, childishly?

But considers

Or snorted we in the seaven sleepers' den?
T'was so; but this, all pleasures fancies bee.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desir'd, and got, t'was but a dreame of thee,

uninspired and contrived.¹ In contrast, he admires Skelton's "emotionally aflame" lines from "Woefully Arrayed":

Woefully arrayed,
my blood, man,
For thee ran,
It may not be nay'd:
My body blue and wan,
Woefully arrayed. . . .

Thus naked am I nail'd, O man, for thy sake!
I love thee, then love me; why sleepest thou? awake!
Remember my ~~tender heart-root~~ for thee brake,

¹The Crowning Privilege (London: Cassell, 1955), p. 83.

With paines my veinës constrained to crake:
 Thus tuggéd to and fro,
 Thus wrappéd all in woe,
 Whereas never man was so,
 Entreated thus in most cruel wise,
 Was like a lamb offered in sacrifice,
 Woefully arrayed.

Of sharp thorn I have worn a crown on my head,
 So painéd, so strainéd, so ruefull, so red,
 Thus bobbéd, thus robbéd, thus for thy love dead,
 Unfeigné I deigné my blood for to shed:
 My feet and handës sore
 The sturdy nailës bore:
 What might I suffer more
 Than I have done, O man, for thee?
 Come when thou list, welcome to me,
 Woefully arrayed. . . .²

Graves' use of myths distinguishes him from his contemporaries. He does not use them arbitrarily or inconsistently. Yeats' "News for The Delphic Oracle," for example, uses mythic figures very loosely:

I

There all the golden codgers lay,
 There the silver dew,
 And the great water sighed for love,
 And the wind sighed too.
 Man-picker Niamh leant and sighed
 By Oisín on the grass;
 There sighed amid his choir of love
 Tall Pythagoras.
 Plotinus came and looked about,
 The salt-flakes on his breast,
 And having stretched and yawned awhile
 Lay sighing like the rest.³

²The Complete Poems of John Skelton (Southampton, England: Camelot Press, 1931), pp. 12-13.

³The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan Co., 1966) p. 323.

O Lynx, guard this orchard,
Keep from Demeter's furrow
This fruit has a fire within it,
Pomona, Pomona
No glass is clearer than are the globes of this flame
what sea is clearer than the pomegranate body
holding the flame?
Pomona, Pomona,

Lynx, keep watch on this orchard
That is named Melagrana
or the Pomegranate field
The sea is not clearer in azure
Nor the Heliads bringing light

Three casual words--does it matter what they were?--
Spoken without remarkable intonation
Or accent, so bewildered him and me,
As it were catching the breath of our conversation,
That each set down his coffee-cup, to stare.
'You have come for us?' my lips cautiously framed--
Her eyes were almost brighter than I could bear--
But she rose and left, unready to be named. (p. 385)

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